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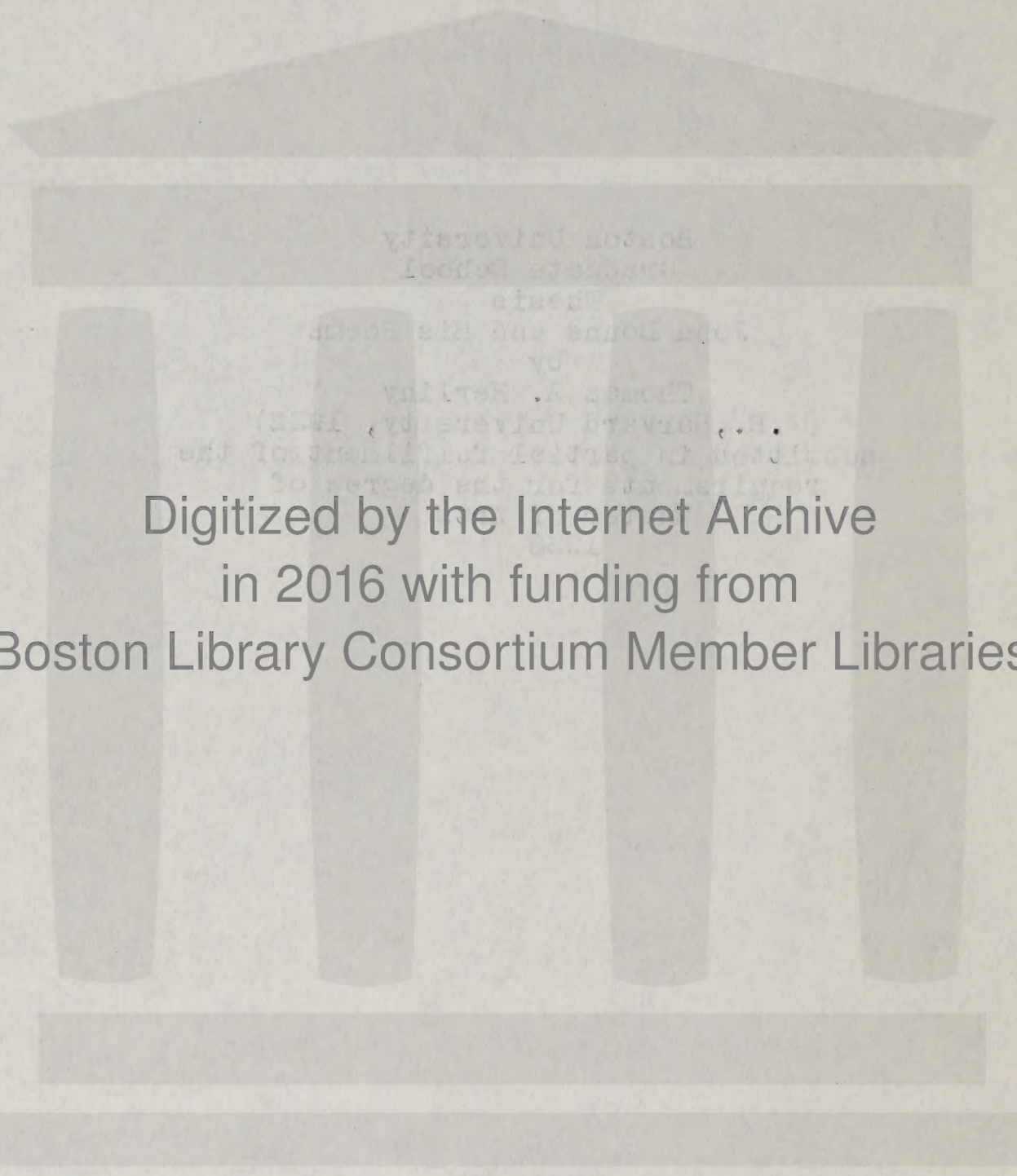


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Boston University  
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Thesis  
John Donne and His Poems  
by  
Thomas A. Herlihy  
(A.B., Harvard University, 1932)  
submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
1938





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## Chapter I

### Introduction

#### "Of Musicke, Joy, Life, and Eternity"

In a letter to Sir Henry Goodyer, John Donne writes:

"These, Sir, are the salads and onions of Mitcham, sent to you with as wholesome affection as your other friends send melons and quelque-choses from Court and London. If I present you not as good diet as they, I would yet say grace to theirs, and bid much good do it you." In the spirit of Donne the<sup>1</sup> thoughts herein are presented.

The main purpose of this paper is to divorce John Donne from the mangled mass of criticism under which three hundred years have tried to bury him. It has been my determination to show John Donne as a rebel and an innovator.

By a study of his ancestral background and his family life, one can depict Donne as an embryonic revolutionist. Then the University training which Donne enjoyed to the fullest, so influenced him as to make him a free, harsh, licentious lover of life. An intent reading of the poems of his early life will unfold the cynical tirades of a rebellious spirit. This satiric vein, so pronounced in his early writings, is never absent from Donne's secular works. The themes common to all Elizabethan writers find no haven in the soul of Donne. He detested their insincerity, he flayed

1. Life and Letters of John Donne, by Sir Edmund Gosse, Vol. I, p.220 edition of 1899.



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their indiscriminate panegyrics, and he would have no part of their conventions.

Since Donne rejected the usual *modus operandi* of the Elizabethans, his pioneering enthusiasm led him into new fields of endeavor. Like the true son of his age, he overthrew existing tenets and established a world of his own where his soul was free and his flights were unhampered. Despising the dictatorial edicts of the great men of his time Donne made no attempt to enjoy their company, but on the contrary, he spurned them because he did not believe that their writings were an honest reflection of their minds. The sacredness of truth transcends everything in the works of the metaphysical poets. Donne's writings are at times abstruse but they are generally truthful. The pinch of poverty was the only force that edged Donne away from literary honesty. In regard to technic Donne was also a pioneer and in Chapter VII I have enumerated more than twelve different types of stanzaic forms which he used. This list is partial at best and is by no means fully representative of his pioneering in versification.

In further support of his "verse wrenching" as some term it, I want to make clear that this was entirely deliberate and not the result of carelessness or inability. Donne toyed with metre and word order as the Elizabethans dallied with puns. He pioneered in the use of words, and by a series of repeated word similarities he gained a melodious counterpoint rendered in harmonious chords.



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Instead of a steady recurrence of accented and unaccented syllables, Donne does superbly the more difficult task of securing harmony by interweaving supposed discords.

Some readers do not enjoy Donne because they are so concerned with the meaning that is being conveyed in the poem, that they fail to benefit by his quaint musical rhythm. After understanding clearly the thought of the poem, read aloud the work for musical effect entirely and a surprising prevalence of music is noted.

To experience this I feel that the following quotation of "Good-Friday, 1613. Riding Westward" is justified:

"Let man Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,  
The intelligence that moves, devotion is,  
And as the other Spheares, by being growne  
Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,  
And being by others hurried every day,  
Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:  
Pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit  
For their first mover, and are whirld by it.  
Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West  
This day, When my Soules forme bends toward the East.  
There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,  
And by that setting endlesse day beget;  
But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,  
Sinne had eternally benighted all.  
Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see  
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.  
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, most dye;  
What a death it were then to see God dye?  
It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,  
It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.  
Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,  
And tune all spheares at once, peirc'd with those  
holes?  
Could I behold that endlesse height which is  
Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,  
Humbled below us? or that blood which is  
The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,  
Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne  
By God, for his apparell, rag'd, and torne?  
If on these things I durst not looke, durst I  
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Made dust of dust, or that flesh which was worn  
By God, for his apparel, yet, and borne?  
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Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus  
 Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?  
 Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,  
 They're present yet unto my memory,  
 For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards  
 mee,  
 O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;  
 I turne my backe to thee, but to receive  
 Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.  
 O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,  
 Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,  
 Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,  
 That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face."

Paralleling these phases of Donne's literary life, namely, the rebel, and the innovator, we have closely intertwined the phases of his life as Jack Donne, the gay young blade; John Donne, the somber mendicant of his middle years; and Dr. Donne, dean of St. Paul's. There is an obvious mingling of the rebel and innovator but the more noted divisions are Jack, John, and Doctor.

To give foundation to my premise that the life as well as the works of Donne are made up of distinct units, I shall review his life with this thought in mind and will examine many of his poetical writings to enable me to offer concrete proof that such a conception as mine is not untenable. Each selection will show Donne to be either a rebel or a pioneering innovator.

To substantiate my belief that Donne did not "deserve hanging for not keeping of accent," I have analyzed more than two thousand lines of his poetry and from this analysis I hope to show Donne to be quite regular in what so many think to be his irregularity.

To do justice to a man of unusual genius, foresight, and



Who was God's partner here, and I wish'd thus  
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influence I shall try to portray Donne as the product of a changing era, of a time when nothing human was secure on the shifting sands of history. His insecurity is seen in his variety of endeavors; his genius is plainly evident in his remarkable contributions to literature. His foresight is unquestioned when one notes the modernness of his thoughts and conceptions. Donne's influence has but begun, faint echoes were heard during his own time, the rumblings have become stronger, and here in America the weight of Donne's influence is greatly felt. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson are but two of the many disciples of Donne. Their verses enjoy the same rampant freedom so dear to the heart of seventeenth century Donne.



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## Chapter II

### The Life of John Donne

"That valiently I hels wide mouth o'rstride."

The England into which Donne was born had been, and still was, experiencing an epoch seething with vitality. Papal supremacy had recently been abolished by the English Church; Sir Thomas More, forebear of Donne the poet, had been beheaded because of ecclesiastical difficulties in the time of Henry the VIII; Elizabeth, the foster parent to a glorious age of literature, had ascended the English throne. Two years after the birth of John Donne, The Theater, first London playhouse, was established--a few years later Shakespeare left his native Stratford-on-Avon to go up to London. About this same time Sir Walter Raleigh made his violent attempt to found a colony in Virginia. Insular England crumbled the power of mighty Spain's Armada and firmly fixed herself as a powerful member of the nations of the world.

'Twas this kind of England that welcomed Donne, but he showed his appreciation by turning the complacent Elizabethan literary world into a maelstrom of eddying and fleeting poetic forms and fancies, the like of which has yet to be duplicated.

Donne was born in London in the parish of St. Nicholas Olave, Bread Street, in the year 1573, the eldest son of a prosperous and highly-regarded ironmonger. John Donne Senior



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was a free man of the City, and served the office of warder of the Iron Monger Company in 1574--but he died in January 1576 when his career was no more than beginning leaving behind him a widow and six children. Donne's father was of Welsh extraction and Izaak Walton tells us that he "was masculinely and lineally descended from a very ancient family in Wales where many of his name now live, that deserve and have great reputation in that Countrey." On his mother's side, Donne was descended from Elizabeth, the third daughter of John Heywood, the famous dramatist whose epigrams had proved so suitably diverting to Queen Mary. Heywood's wife was Elizabeth Rastell, who was daughter to John Rastell and Elizabeth More, sister to the much celebrated Sir Thomas More. Both branches of Donne's family were distinguished and devoted adherents of the old faith and dearly they paid for their devotion. In Donne's early life persecution was brought near; for his only brother died in prison because he harbored a proscribed priest. His grandfather, John Heywood, lost his property by royal confiscation--one uncle was driven from his home in Antwerp by a fanatical mob, and died of the shock; still another, Father Jasper Heywood, who was visiting England on a mission from Rome, barely escaped hanging, but he was thrown into prison where he languished more than a year, and soon after being released he suffered a sentence of life-long banishment, and died at Naples--an exile.

1. The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Dr. Robert Sanderson. By Izaak Walton. Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee and Co. 1860. Page 53



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 1880. Pp. 55



Speaking of his family, Donne wrote in 1610: "No family which is not of far larger and greater branches hath endured and suffered more in their persons and fortunes for obeying the teachers of Roman Doctrine."

On his death in 1576, Donne's father left his widow in comfortable circumstances, and his son John a handsome legacy of three thousand pounds when he should come of age. It was at this time that both the Pope and the Queen had resolved to force the people to make a choice. Donne's mother hesitated not at all, for she hated all that pertained to Protestantism. One may conclude that her children were subject to the rigid terms of Romanism and this influence was ever and always felt by the poet Donne. Of Donne's early training we know little. We do know that his mother engaged capable tutors for the boy, and issued strict orders he should be spared the rod and most carefully corrected.

Walton tells us that Donne had a good command of both Latin and French when he was sent to Oxford at the age of eleven. Be that as it may, Donne went up to Oxford with his younger brother Henry in 1584. He was entered at Hart Hall (later merged with Magdalen Hall) where he was in residence for two years. It was rather unusual that boys of this age (John being 11 and Henry 10) be registered at Oxford--still it was not so uncommon as is often assumed. However, the poet left Oxford after his two years' stay and then went to Cambridge. He remained at Trinity College until the fall of



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1589, but he never took a degree probably because he was opposed to taking the oath which was the crucial test of loyalty to the English crown and church. It was at Cambridge that Donne became acquainted with Christopher Brooke, who was to be famed through posterity because of his association with the poet.

We are told by Walton that while Donne was at Oxford he had the estimable reputation of being "another Picus Mirandula, of whom story says that he was rather born than made wise by study." "In the most unsettled days of his youth, " Walton says, "his bed was not able to detain him beyond the hour of four in the morning; and it was no common business that drew him out of his chamber till past ten; all which time was employed in study; though he took great liberty after it."

On leaving Cambridge Donne worked for some time with private tutors, concentrating particularly on mathematics and "other liberal sciences." It was probably during this interim that Donne began thinking seriously of religion, its rewards and handicaps. Donne was a free-thinking intellect at this time, and he began to display his independence in his laxity toward things Roman.

Early in 1592, at the age of nineteen, Donne and his friend Christopher Brooke were admitted to Lincoln's Inn, where they shared living quarters. It was about this time that the disastrous episode previously mentioned occurred to Henry Donne.

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1. Walton--page 54
2. Walton--page 100



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quarters at Thavies Inn. Donne was incarcerated and died of fever in Clink Prison. 'This incident surely impressed the elder Donne; indeed he was so concerned about his position in regard to religion that he seriously began a systematic study of the merits of the disputed sects. Walton tells us that "Beginning to undertake this search he believed that Cardinal Bellarmine to be the best defender of the Roman Cause, and therefore he took himself to the examination of his Reasons. The Cause was weighty and wilful delays had been inexcusable both towards God and his own conscience;....about the twentieth year of his age, did show the then Dean of Gloucester.....all the Cardinals works marked with many weighty observations under his own hand....."

Walton seems to be faulty in this comment since the "Disputations" of Bellarmine did not appear until 1593. However, the obvious fact is that the closeness of persecution to Donne's own self and the distance of the poet from his mother's dominant influence caused, or at least precipitated, Donne's conversion to the Anglican Church. The actual conversion was preceded by a period of religiosity which is best described as Christian.

During the period at Lincoln's Inn, Donne was broadening himself in many phases of life. One cannot forget Jack Donne, the gay young blade. Freed of home ties, freed of religious bondage, exposed to the riotous life of a law student, Donne gloried in the fitful life about him. He was of it because he

1. Walton p. 56







wanted to be.

One cannot lose sight of the fact that Donne, still in his teens, or surely in his very early twenties, was a person of extensive experiences. His life in the household of such staunch Papists as John and Elizabeth Donne--the trials through which the family had passed in supporting the old faith--the religiously cramped life of a Catholic at Anglican Oxford--the remarkable heritage Donne was heir to on his mother's side of the family--the spirited nature inbred in him by his father--all these deeply impressed the poet's mind and actions. Donne was alive and sensitive to all things and these are but a few and a very few of the influences that impressionistic Jack Donne felt. Other forces--potential and engulfing--awaited the more mature John Donne.

It is my contention that in this man's life we have three distinct phases: 1. Jack Donne; 2. John Donne; 3. Dr. Donne of St. Paul's.

Let us now consider Jack Donne--the carefree man about London.

By his study at Lincoln's Inn, Donne had either consciously or unconsciously prepared himself for a life in public service. Being a wealthy, well-liked young blade, Donne enjoyed promising prospects of a happy life. His friends were many and influential, but he was an adherent to Catholicism. To evade the dampening influences of affiliations with the waning faith, Donne, Walton tells us, entered the Anglican Communion in 1593--the year of his brother's death. Contrary



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By his study at Lincoln's Inn, Donne had either consciously or unconsciously prepared himself for a life in public service. Being a wealthy, well-limed young blade, Donne enjoyed promising prospects of a happy life. His friends were many and influential, but he was an adherent to Catholicism. To evade the dampening influences of affiliations with the waning faith, Donne, Walton tells us, entered the Anglican Communion in 1593--the year of his brother's death. Certainly



information put forth by Sir Edmund Gosse indicates that there is nothing to show that he became an Anglican until 1603. However, from a comprehensive study of his poetry and his biographies, it is my belief that the exact time of cession from the one and his conversion to the other, would be very difficult to establish. Influences overlay one another to such an extent that the beginning of one is lost in the end of its predecessor. The Roman doctrines had taxed Donne heavily and at an early age. He saw their tendency to stifle the success of his future, and consequently he forsook, without doubt, the externals of the religion, but never was he able to lay off the inherent forces and teachings of Catholicism. One may conclude that the actual date of transition from one religion to the other is unknown, since definite knowledge in such affairs is unknowable.

Donne certainly applied himself diligently to the study of law. He had always enjoyed study, and as a perusal of his works indicates, his mind was extremely active, agile, and logical in its processes of thought. For three or four years after his admission to Lincoln's Inn, Donne enjoyed new experiences which further broadened the youthful poet. He gave unusual indication of inherent brilliance while at Lincoln's Inn, but a practical usage of the study of law never was his.

In this connection it may be well to look to the mature words of the convert himself written in the Pseudo-Martyr of 1610: "They," he says, "who have descended so low as to take



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knowledge of me, and to admit me into their consideration, know well that I used no inordinate haste nor precipitation in binding my conscience to any local religion. I had a longer work to do than many other men; for I was first to blot out certain impressions of the Roman religion, and to wrestle both against the examples and against the reasons by which some hold was taken and some anticipations early laid upon my conscience, both by persons who by nature had a power and superiority over my will, and others who by their learning and good life seemed to me justly to claim an interest for the guiding and rectifying of mine understanding in these matters<sup>1</sup>!"

These words are not the report half a century afterwards of the conversation of an elderly man, but the confessions of the man himself at the age of thirty-seven. It is necessary to interpolate this remark, because the passage in Pseudo-Martyr immediately proceeds:

"And although I apprehended well enough that this irresolution not only retarded my fortune, but also bred some scandal and endangered my spiritual reputation by laying me open to many misinterpretations, yet all these respects did not transport me to any violent and sudden determination till I had, to the measure of my power and judgment, surveyed and digested the whole body of divinity, controverted between ours and the Roman Church. In which search and disquisition, that God, which awakened me then, and hath never forsaken me in that industry, as He is the author of that purpose, so is He



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a witness of this protestation, that I behaved myself and proceeded therein with humility and diffidence in myself; and by that which, by His grace, I take to the ordinary means,<sup>1</sup> which is frequent prayer and equal and indifferent affections."

One must bear in mind that these words are the thoughts of the poet himself at the age of thirty-seven.

During this epoch of indecision and close research in matters religious, John Donne was writing poetry, and it is this poetry that causes such consternation to the conventional minds of many. Ben Jonson was one of the closest observers and was also one of the most thoroughly disturbed of Donne's readers. Since that time a gamut of readers have cursorily read Donne, and when a first reading suggested nothing to their minds, they rebuked him and shelved him.

As far as is known, the "Satires" of Donne were published<sup>2</sup> posthumously. There are seven satires; of these the first five were published in 1633, the sixth in 1635, and the seventh in 1669. Had Donne wished to print his attempts at satire, he would have been prevented by the action of the Bishops in 1599. On June 1, 1599, John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, issued an edict saying, "That no Satires or Epigrams be printed hereafter." Four days after the publication of this order the poems of Marston were publicly burned, as was the poetry of Hall and Guilpin.

Reverting to his earlier years, when twenty-three, Donne

1. Gosse Vol. 1. p. 26

2. Hayward p. 120



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made his first venture into foreign service under the Earl of Essex. Spain was again threatening the power which England had assumed by the crushing of the Armada. Spain had secured a foothold in Brittany. The Queen issued a commission in April of 1596 empowering Essex and the Lord Admiral Hovend to aid Sir Walter Raleigh and Lord Thomas Howard to go against the Spanish. On June 1st one hundred and fifty ships sailed for the continent on one of which Donne went on his first expedition abroad. The composition of the epigram "Coles and Guyaya" is usually attributed to this period. Essex returned victoriously to England in the fall of 1596.

On July 10, 1596, one year after his first venture, Donne again set forth from Plymouth with Essex on the famous ship "Repulse" for the islands of Azores. This is the expedition usually referred to as the Islands Voyage. This voyage was interrupted by a storm which disrupted the plans of the English, but gave rise to the famous twin poems, "The Storme" and "The Calme." Needless to say, these voyages, as Donne ably tells us in his poems, proved very unsuccessful.

After the venture just mentioned Walton says, "He returned not back into England till he had stayed some years, first in Italy, and then in Spain, where he made many useful observations of those countries, their laws and manner of government, and returned perfect in their languages." <sup>1</sup>

This carries us to another period in the life of Donne, of which Gosse says: "The career of Donne between 1592, when  
1. Walton p. 57



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This carries us to another period in the life of Donne, of which Donne says: "The career of Donne between 1592, when



he entered at Lincoln's Inn, and 1602, when he married, is shrouded in a mist, which is the more exasperating to the biographer in that just enough is revealed through it to show the value of what is hidden. It is, however, useless to dogmatise as to the exact sequence of the poet's interesting <sup>1</sup> movements."

We do know that at some period Donne saw military service, travelled the continent, and became private secretary to Lord <sup>2</sup> Ellesmere. As is suggested, it is mere conjecture to date the activities of Donne and years are left unaccounted for. No doubt Donne travelled quite extensively--in fact this seems to be the best explanation of the hasty dissipation of the fortune left to him by his father. Donne seems loath to confirm facts of his early life, or those of his period of travel, but this is probably explained by his desire to bury Jack Donne before his Dr. John Donne became aware of his existence.

One fact is definitely reflected to us with fidelity and exactness, mirrored for us by the poet's own writings, namely, the great expanse of freedom of mind, soul and body that Donne was enjoying during this epoch. John Donne the adventurer, the seeker of fortune, the lover of life, was "lapping up the miles", but John Donne the sceptic, thinker, and connoisseur of life in its many phases, was drinking deep of all the experiences and externalizing his reflections in immortal poetry. We see in his writings a confused mass of accumulated thoughts,

impressions, and experiences. We see an orphaned boyhood,

1. Gosse, vol. I, P. 55

2. Gosse, Vol. I, P. 56 ff.



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persecution of his family, travelled youth, brilliant but stifled university days, tempetuous youth at law school--riotous, yet in keeping with the times--public service in foreign expeditions; flight from his family religious and domestic ties; all these we see in the songs and sonnets, epigrams and other writings of Jack Donne.

About this time we see a change in Donne. He becomes more pliable--or better said--less incorrigible. He is slowly passing from the Jack Donne stage to the John Donne phase of his life. Ben Johnson, coeval with Donne, told Drummond of Hawthornden that Donne wrote "all his best pieces 'ere he was twenty-five years old." Be that as it may, he was very insistent that his poems be not published, and many commentators on the poets of the time were entirely oblivious to the works of this man while they filled folios on men long since forgotten.

While a student at Lincoln's Inn, Donne certainly must have come into contact with Thomas Egerton, who held the office of Lent-Reader there since 1582, and it is not improbable that Egerton was aware of the presence of the brilliant John Donne. Egerton was rocketed through a series of preferment until on May 6, 1596, Queen Elizabeth made him Lord Keeper of the Great Seal.

Egerton had lost his first wife, Elizabeth Ravenscroft, some years before, and had but recently married Elizabeth, the widow of Sir John Wooley of Pyrford. She had a widower brother, Sir George More of Losely. Sir George had several children,



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among whom was his third daughter, Anne, born in 1584.

Donne probably had associations with Egerton's son Thomas (child of his first marriage) on the expedition to Cadiz in 1596. But we surely know that not long after the return of the Azores expedition to England in the fall of 1597, Donne attracted the notice of Egerton, who in the winter of the same year made inquiries into "his learning, languages and other abilities, and much affecting his person and behaviour took him to be his chief secretary."<sup>1</sup>

The household at York House in the Strand, consisted not only of Egerton's two sons, but also of the second wife's son, Francis Wooley. Anne More, favorite niece of the new Lady Egerton, was a frequent visitor, whose visits became more numerous and of longer duration. By these people Donne was well liked--in fact Egerton "never thought him to be so much his servant, as to forget he was his friend; and to testify it, did always use him with much courtesy, appointing him at place at his own table, to which he esteemed his company and discourse to be a great ornament."<sup>2</sup>

His secretarial duties carried him abroad in 1598, to the Low Countries, where diplomatic dealings accomplished by Egerton and Lord Buckhearst were of great political and financial profit to the Queen. It is probable that on an occasion of this time and in recognition of his part in such work the Lord<sub>3</sub> Keeper says of Donne: "He is fitter to serve a King than a subject."

1: Gosse, Vol. I p. 89.  
2: Walton p. 57

3. Gosse, Vol. I. p. 93



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Donne was secretary to Lord Egerton for five years, and during that time he was closely connected with many momentous happenings of English court life. It was most fortunate that the young poet was in daily contact with one of the foremost men of England, and this association caused a definite change in his moral life. Perhaps no other influence in his life was as forceful and lasting as the five years spent in the household of the Lord Keeper. Here he was not only in contact with an outstanding statesman of the day, but also he was intimate with the workings of the government--and of greatest import, he was in contact with Anne More.

His poetry from this time forward clearly indicates a changed outlook for the poet Donne. In January of 1600, the second Lady Egerton died, and Anne More seems to have remained at York House to supervise the household of Egerton. The girl was sixteen years old at this time, but not as immature as her years would suggest, particularly in those times when more real life was experienced by the younger folk. No doubt a clandestine courtship had been in the making prior to the death of Anne's watchful aunt, but now that she was dead, Donne found one less obstacle before him. But affairs were brought to a very sudden climax with the announcement of the Lord Keeper that he was about to take a third wife. This he did on October 20, 1600. Immediately Anne More went back to her father's house at Losely in the county of Surrey, but before the parting Donne and Miss More plighted their troth, as



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Walton tells us "by some faithful promises which were so inter-<sup>1</sup>changeably passed, as never to be violated by either party."

Anne More was malleable in the hands of the dashing young secretary, who was hotly tempered by his consuming love.

Donne called on Christopher Brooke, his friend of Lincoln's Inn days, to give away the bride. Christopher's brother, Samuel, who had recently, and most conveniently, taken orders, performed the marriage ceremony. We are told by Fausset that Francis Wooley, always friendly to Donne, was expected to bring Anne safely to the church.<sup>2</sup> So in the early days of December (probably the fifth) John Donne and Anne More were married.

Commenting on the marriage, Leslie Stephen says: "A clandestine marriage with a girl of sixteen who lived in his patron's house was a singular blunder for an ambitious young man at the outset of his career."<sup>3</sup> Dr. Jessop speaking of the incident says, "A double offence had been committed by the parties concerned. First an offence against the Canon Law in marrying a girl without the consent of her father, and, secondly, a civil offense against the Common Law, it was a very serious business."<sup>4</sup> Indeed this last point cannot be too greatly stressed since it cost Donne the friendship of Egerton, and so disturbed the ire of his father-in-law, that he was thrown into prison at his command.

1. Walton p. 58

2. John Donne--Hugh l'Anson Fausset p. 95.

3. Studies of a Biographer. Leslie Stephen, 1683. p. 50.

4. Gosse, Vol. I, p. 99



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1. Wilton p. 58
2. John Donne--Hugh I'Anson rumour p. 95.
3. Studies of a Biographer. Leslie Stephen, 1883. p. 50.
4. Gosse, Vol. I, p. 92



Donne strove to explain himself to Sir George More by the following letters which he entrusted to his friend and emissary, the Earl of Northumberland, to be carried to his bride's father in an attempt to break the news to Sir George of the secret marriage of his daughter to Sir Thomas Egerton's secretary. The letter conveyed by Northumberland at this time bears quotation:

"To Sir George More. Sir,--If a very respective fear of your displeasure and a doubt that my lord (whom I know, out of your worthiness, to love you much) would be so compassionate with you as to add his anger to yours, did not so much increase my sickness as that I cannot stir, I had taken the boldness to have done the office of this letter by waiting upon you myself to have given you truth and clearness of this matter between your daughter and me, and to show you plainly the limits of our fault, by which I know your wisdom will proportion the punishment.

"So long since as her being at York House this had foundation, and so much then of promise and contract built upon it as, without violence to conscience, might not be shaken.

"At her lying in town this Parliament I found means to see her twice or thrice. We both knew the obligations that lay upon us, and we adventured equally; and about three weeks before Christmas we married. And as at the doing there were not used five persons, of which I protest to you by my salvation there was not one that had any dependence or relation to you, so in all the passage of it did I forbear to use any such person, who



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by furtherance of it might violate any trust or duty towards you.

The reasons why I did not fore-acquaint you with it (to deal with the same plainness I have used) were these:- I knew my present estate less than fit for her. I knew (yet I knew not why) that I stood not right in your opinion. I knew that to have given any intimation of it had been to impossibilite the whole matter. And then, having these honest purposes in our hearts and these fetters in our consciences, methinks we should be pardoned if our fault be but this, that we did not, by fore-revealing of it, consent to our hindrance and torment.

"Sir, I acknowledge my fault to be so great, as I dare scarce offer any other prayer to you in mine own behalf than this, to believe this truth,--that I neither had dishonest end nor means. But for her, whom I tender much more than my fortunes or life (else I would I might neither joy in this life nor enjoy the next), I humbly beg of you that she may not, to her danger, feel the terror of your sudden anger.

"I know this letter shall find you full of passion; but I know no passion can alter your reason and wisdom, to which I adventure to commend these particulars;--that it is irremediably done; that if you incense my lord, you destroy her and me; that it is easy to give us happiness, and that my endeavours and industry, if it please you to prosper them, may soon make me somewhat worthier of her.

"If any take the advantage of your displeasure against me, and fill you with ill thoughts of me, my comfort is that you know that faith and thanks are due to them only that speak when



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"If any take the advantage of your displeasure against me,  
and fill you with ill thoughts of me, my comfort is that you  
know that false and thanks are due to them only that speak when



their informations might do good, which now it cannot work towards any party. For my excuse I can say nothing, except I knew what were said to you.

"Sir, I have truly told you this matter, and I humbly beseech you so to deal in it as the persuasions of Nature, Reason, Wisdom, and Christianity shall inform you; and to accept the vows of one whom you may now raise or scatter--which are, that as my love is directed unchangeably upon her, so all my labours shall concur to her contentment, and to show my humble obedience to yourself.

"Yours in all duty and humbleness,

"J. Donne,

"From my lodging by the Savoy,

2nd February 1601 (2).

"To the Right Worshipful Sir George More, Kt." <sup>1</sup>

His wrath unappeased by Donne's efforts at peace-making, Sir George sought to have Donne dismissed from the service of Sir Thomas Egerton, but the latter, a considerate, and tolerant man, told More that "errors might be overpunished, and desired him therefore to forbear till second considerations might clear some scruples." <sup>2</sup> It must be remembered that Donne had deported himself admirably in the service of Sir Thomas, and the Lord Keeper was very fond of his secretary. However, after much persuasion on the part of Anne More's father, and facilitated by illness which confined Donne to his new lodgings by the Savoy Sir Thomas finally complied with More's childish desire for satisfaction and display of influence, by dismissing

1. Gosse Vol. 1. p. 100

2. Walton, p. 60



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Donne from his employ. Greatly bowed down by all adversities that now were fixed against him, John Donne was overpowered by despair. The only good produced by the incident is that beautiful epigrammatic jewel occasioned by a letter, now lost, from John to his bride, in which after his signature, Walton<sup>1</sup> tells us, was written, "John Donne-Anne Donne-Undone."

Sufficient retribution had not been meted out by Sir George More. He still thirsted for satisfaction, and consequently on February 10, 1602, caused Donne and the two Brookes to be committed to three separate prisons.

Donne was soon given permission to leave Fleet Prison, probably because of his health, but he was now faced with destitution. His years in the service of Sir Thomas Egerton had paid him well, but he was heavily in debt. Walton attributes it to "youth, and travel, and needless bounty."

Sir George More tried to render the marriage nil, but he was finally dissuaded, and after an interview with Donne he actually attempted to restore his son-in-law in the service of Sir Thomas Egerton. But the Lord Keeper, conscious of the publicity caused by the attempt to invalidate the marriage, replied to Sir George More, "That though he was unfeignedly sorry for what he had done, it was yet inconsistent with his place and credit to discharge and readmit servants at the request of passionate petitioners."<sup>1</sup>

Walton, p. 60







In the latter part of April the marriage of Donne was confirmed by the Commissioners--yet the lovers were still kept apart. Donne was now almost thirty years of age--thirteen years the senior of his bride--he was without position, money, or definite prospects, but certainly with a genuine and constant (despite his poems) love for his wife. Finally Sir George More lifted the paternal guard from his daughter and permitted her to go to her husband.

To the aid of the floundering Donne came Sir Francis Wooley, cousin to Anne More. Through inheritance he had come into the possession of a very beautiful estate at Pyrford, in Surrey. To this home Wooley welcomed the Donnes; there they were invited to make their temporary home. The years that followed until 1604 seem to have been spent in Pyrford. We know not what Donne's means of livelihood was at this time, for the entire period is blank to us. Here in 1603 and 1604 the first two of the twelve children which Anne Donne was destined to bear were born.

After living with his wife's relations for some time he moved to a dwelling in Mitcham, where many of his children were born. It is usually believed, despite the inference of Walton, that Donne lived on at Pyrford with Sir Francis Wooley until 1604 and in 1605 Donne took up residence at Mitcham.

At the suggestion of Christopher Brooke, who pressed Donne to evince more interest in possible patronage at Court, John Donne took up lodgings in the Strand in 1605. He had left



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his ever-increasing family at Mitcham. During these years (1605-06) Donne was working with Thomas Morton on his pamphlet against the Jesuits--thus enabling the young poet to give vent to his long quelled passions.

In the year 1607, Morton was appointed Dean of Gloucester, and consequently needed Donne's assistance no longer. However, he was anxious to have Donne take orders, and sought to have him do so by offering him a benefice which was in his power to grant. Donne refused--but only temporarily, for poverty and a fast growing family forced him to cease being independent in his religious thought and settle on the Anglican Church as his.

Izaak Walton says that Donne said to Morton:-

'I dare make so dear a friend as you are my confessor: some irregularities of my life have been so visible to some men, that though I have, I thank God, made my peace with Him by penitential resolution against them and by the assistance of His grace, banished them my affections: yet this, which God knows to be so, is not so visible to men, as to free me from their censures, and, it may be, that sacred calling from a dishonour. And besides, whereas it is determined by the best of casuists that God's glory should be the first end, and a maintenance the second motive to embrace that calling; though each man may propose to himself both together; yet the first may not be put last without a violation of conscience, which He that searches the heart will judge. And truly my present condition is such, that if I ask my own conscience, whether it be reconcilable to that rule, it is at this time so perplexed



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about it, that I can neither give myself nor you an answer. You know, sir, who says, 'Happy is that man whose conscience doth not accuse him for that thing which he does.' To these I might add other reasons that dissuade me; but I crave your favour that I may forbear to express them, and thankfully decline your<sup>1</sup> offer.'"

One may feel certain that his suggestion that the irregularities of his youth prevented him from accepting Morton's offer was in reality only a show for the rebel mind of Donne the free-thinker. He was not quite ready to give in to any set religion, but as previously suggested, he was fast approaching that state of submission.

On the sixteenth of February, 1606, a license was issued to Donne to travel on the continent for three years, that is, the limit of travel was to be three years. It was probably at this time that Anne Donne suggested in fun that she accompany her husband in the garb of a page boy. The reason for the journey is conjecture--either he went simply to travel, or more likely, he went on a mission to secure information for Sir Thomas Morton.

Conditions continued to be most unsatisfactory at Mitcham, and in 1608 reached a climax. Once again Sir Francis Wooley came to the assistance of the poet. He insisted that the dowry of Anne More be settled. Sir George, now on friendly terms with the Donnes, agreed, Walton says, "To pay Mr. Donne eight hundred pounds at a certain day, as a portion with his wife, or

1. Walton p. 6



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twenty pounds quarterly for their maintenance, as the interest<sup>1</sup> for it, till the said portion was paid."

With such a settlement Donne's misfortunes left him and his large family, and most patient wife. Almost immediately he left his "prison" at Mitcham to take up lodgings at London.

Concurrent with such good fortune was a more active renewal of friendship with Lady Russell, Countess of Bedford, whom he had met at Mitcham. She had aided Donne when his fortunes were at lowest ebb--probably because Sir Henry Goodyer had acquainted her with Donne's background. On returning to London he visited her at her home at Twickenham Park, and from her he received all the inspiration and encouragement which he needed to vitalize his long dormant literary aspirations. Coincidental in Donne's life are a renewal of literary production and the freedom from financial worries.

In 1610 Sir Robert Drury, a very opulent resident of Hawsted, in Suffolk, became acquainted with Donne. The friendship which resulted gave new vitality and direction to the thoughts of the poet. Elizabeth Drury, whom Donne celebrated in a noble poem, was the only daughter of Sir Robert and died when fifteen years of age. Although the poet never saw the girl, he began composition of a "funeral elegy" in her honor. So thankful was Sir Robert that he was determined to have Donne near him, and therefore "assigned him and his wife a useful apartment in his own large house in Drury Lane, and not only rent-free, but was also a cherisher of his studies, and

1. Gosse Vol. I p. 208



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such a friend or sympathisor with him and his in all their joy<sup>1</sup> and sorrows."

By way of compensation for a delightful year spent at Drury Lane, Donne wrote a second poem called "An Anatomy of the World," in honor of the first anniversary of Miss Drury's death, and a third poem appeared a year later to celebrate the second anniversary.

So pleased was Sir Robert Drury with the literary compensation paid him for his hospitality, that he took Donne abroad with him in 1612 to Amiens, where they spent three months, and then they went on to Paris. Usually attributed to this period are the poems "Sweetest Love, I Do Not Go," and "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning." Anne Donne was ill--she had had her eighth child which died at birth--and she was not willing to be left alone in her grief. To assuage such anguish Donne composed these beautiful lyrics.

During this period of continental travel there was an effusion of letters of devotion to Countess of Bedford (Lucy Russell) of Twickenham, whose acquaintanceship Donne made while the Countess was visiting Sir Julius Caesar at Mitcham in the autumn of 1608. These epistles indicate to the student that Donne was seeking by hyperbolic discretion to entrench himself and his fast-growing family against the ravages of a penniless existence, which was altogether too well known to the Donnes. Donne was now in middle age (40 years old); he and his family needed security--and patronage seemed the most likely



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avenue to success.

Theology offered no solution at this time, since Donne was still too much of an independent thinker. In addition to lack of suitable position, Donne fell ill in July, 1613, stricken by a combination of gastric and rheumatic disorders, and was later threatened with blindness. Mrs. Donne's health was being undermined by the many and frequent child-births. Nicholas, who was baptized at St. Clement Doves on August 3, 1613, brought her closer to her impending end. Sickness also settled on the Donne children; Mary died in November of the same year, and no further mention of Nicholas suggests that he too passed away during the same year.

During these last few years as a layman, Donne became involved in one of the most questionable intrigues of his career. The story of Rochester and the Countess of Essex (a young lady of twenty-two years who had a vile temper abetted by recklessness and wantonness) is only too well known and presents a disgusting story best treated by omission. Donne, surely not unmindful of the baseness of Rochester, sought his assistance in securing ordination. It is suggested to us by Sidney Dack that Rochester was willing to exchange his influence in obtaining Donne's request for the legal knowledge of the poet. Any promise of assistance made by Rochester was never honored, which fact is to some degree alleviating in a consideration of the character of Donne.

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almost as quickly as it had been conceived, and no further mention of entering the Church appears until three years later.

In 1614 Donne again attempted to seek favour at Court, by writing a bitter invective against his old leader, Sir Walter Raleigh. Raleigh had merited confinement in the Tower, awaiting execution, and from thence he presented to the world his "History of the World." The attack was intended to gain favour for Donne in the eyes of the King at the expense of the imprisoned Raleigh. But again he was rewarded with no secular court favor. "No man attends Court fortunes with more impatience than I do," said Donne. Truly no one ever sought court favour so avidly and so unsuccessfully as Donne. King James seemed to be determined that Donne was best fitted for clerical preferment, and consequently said in answer to an appeal of Somerset that "I know Mr. Donne is a learned man, has abilities of a learned divine, and will prove a successful preacher; and my desire is to prefer him in that way, and in that way I will deny you nothing for him."<sup>1</sup>

It was at this period of his life that we are aware that Donne is being forced into the mould of Dr. Donne against which he had carried on a stubborn fight. After some bickering Donne finally decided, in 1615, to take Orders, and was ordained as Dr. Jessopp has said, "On the 25th of January, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul,"<sup>2</sup> in St. Paul's Cathedral. It is not a misstatement to say that he was starved into

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1. Gosse, Vol. II p. 60

2. Gosse, Vol. II p. 70



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assistant in Paddington, a rural parish, where he preached his first sermon. His financial worries continued, and he was still fathering newly-born children--striving to care for both problems by begging assistance from his wealthy friends.

The King seemed to be in no hurry to make Donne an attache of court. However, Walton tells us that in the same year, 1615, he preached for the first time before the King at Whitehall. Much was expected of the new cleric at this time, and he more than lived up to expectations. The King was greatly enthralled by the preachings of Donne, who "preached the Word so, as showed his own heart was possessed with those very thoughts and joys that he laboured to distil into others; a preacher in earnest; weeping sometimes for his auditory, sometimes with them; always preaching to himself, like an angel from a cloud, but in none; carrying some, as St. Paul was, to heaven in holy raptures, and enticing others by a sacred art and courtship to amend their lives; here picturing a vice so as to make it ugly to those that practised it, and a virtue so as to make it beloved even by those that loved it not; and all this with a most particular grace and an unexpressible addition of <sup>1</sup>comeliness."

In the same year (1615) the newly appointed divine received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University of Cambridge, but not without opposition to the request of the King that the degree be granted to Donne. Gosse says that "With an extremely bad grace the University gave way" (to the

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King's demand), "and on April 7, 1615, Chamberlain writes to Sir Dudley Carleton: 'John Donne and one Cheke went out Docters at Cambridge with much ado after our coming away by the King's express mandate, though the Vice-Chancellor and some other of the heads called them openly 'filios Noctis' and 'tenebriones' that sought thus to come in at the window, when there was a fair gate open. But the worst is that Donne had gotten a reversion of the Deanery of Canterbury, if such grants would be lawful, whereby he hath purchased himself a great deal of envy, that a man of his sort should seek 'per saltum' to intercept such a place from so many more worthy and ancient Divines."

In April, 1616, Donne was given charge of Keyston, a village in Huntingdonshire, and in July of the same year he was made rector of Seven Oaks in Kent, a benefice which he held until his death. He never lived in either parish, and he severed his connexion with Keyston in 1622. These appointments freed Donne from all financial worries--and the propriety of holding more than one rectorship is justified by Dr. Jessopp's remark that, "In those days the holder of a benefice was considered to have done his duty to the parish from which he derived his income, if he took due care that the ordinary ministrations of divine service in the sanctuary were adequately provided for, and the parsonage occupied by a curate who ministered to the necessities and spiritual wants of the people. There was no feeling against a man of learning and eminence

1. Gosse Vol. II, p. 84.



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holding two or more livings in plurality. It was thought better that a clergyman of great gifts should be supported out of the surplus income of a rich benefice, and allowed to exercise his talents in a sphere which needed his personal presence and influence, rather than that he should be buried in a country village where he would be likely to live and die<sup>1</sup> forgotten and unknown."

In October of this most productive year (1616), Donne was elected Divinity Reader to the benchers at Lincoln's Inn, where he had studied years before. This position was sought after by all London clerics because of its lucrativeness. Donne's duty, according to the order of the Bench, was "to preach every Sabbath day in the term, both forenoon and afternoon, and once the Sabbath days before and after every term, and on the Grand Days every forenoon, and in the reading times, who is to take place next the Double Readers that have now read, or hereafter shall read, or hereafter shall fine for their double readings."

Donne's wife died on August 15, 1617, after bearing him twelve children, five of whom were dead. It was the loss of his wife, Gosse declares, "which brought about the final<sup>2</sup> process of sanctification and illumination." Burial of Anne Donne took place in the Church of St. Clement Danes, where her husband had a monument raised in her memory. Walton credits Donne erroneously with preaching an emotional elegy for his department wife, but in reality, later biographies tell us, "after shutting himself up in his house until the bitterness of

1. Gosse Vol. II, p. 91

2. Gosse, Vol. II p. 101



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In October of this year (1840), James was  
elected Member of Parliament for the borough of Southwark, where  
he had resided for some years. This position was again filled by  
all London efforts, because of his unpopularity. James's duty,  
according to the order of the House, was "to present every  
Bill in the House, both in the morning and afternoon, and on the  
the Sabbath days before and after every day, and on the third  
days every fortnight, and in the reading time, and to take  
place next the House of Commons and have no read, or resolution  
shall read, or resolution shall read for their double reading."

James's wife died on August 15, 1841, after bearing his  
twelve children, five of whom were dead. It was the loss of  
his wife, James writes, "which brought about the final  
process of dissolution and annihilation." "A trial of time  
James took place in the House of Commons, James, who was  
present and a momentary relief in her memory. James's  
James's emotional, with presenting an emotional side, for his  
depressed wife, but in reality, James's wife was  
"after showing himself up in the House until the bitterness of  
1. James, Vol. II, p. 11  
2. James, Vol. II, p. 11



his anguish was over, we see Donne here putting his bereavement behind him, and resuming, with stately impassibility, his priestly<sup>1</sup> tasks."

The loving heart of Donne which had so devotedly revered Anne More through the many vicissitudes of their tempestuous life, now turned with a greater intellectual zeal to the Church. Walton's tender description of this time of Donne's life bears repetition: "In this retiredness, which was often from the sight of his dearest friends, he became crucified to the world, and all those vanities, those imaginary pleasures, that are daily acted on that restless stage; and they were as perfectly crucified to him. Nor is it hard to think (being passions may be both changed and heightened by accidents) but that that abundant affection which once was betwixt him and her, who had long been the delight of his eyes, and the companion of his youth; her, with whom he had divided so many pleasant sorrows and contented fears, as common people are not capable of; not hard to think but that she now removed by death, a commensurable grief took so full a possession of his heart, as to leave no place for joy; if it did, it was a joy to be alone, where, like a pelican in the wilderness, he might bemoan himself without witness or restraint, and pour forth his passions like Job in the days of his affliction: 'O that I might have the desire of my heart', O that God would grant the thing that I long for! For then, as the grave is become her house, so I would hasten to make it mine also; that we two

1. Gosse Vol. II p. 95



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might there make our beds together in the dark.' Thus as the Israelites sat mourning by the rivers of Babylon, when they remembered Sion, so he gave some ease to his oppressed heart by thus venting his sorrows; thus he began the day and ended the night; ended the restless night, and began the weary day in lamentations.<sup>1</sup>"

After some months of preaching, his Lincoln's Inn congregations noticed that Donne was lapsing into "an infirm and valetudinarian state." Luckily a complete lapse was forestalled by the thoughtfulness of the King, who had also noted the ill-health of his chaplain. Political affairs in Bohemia had created great concern at London, and it was decided that Viscount Doncaster (also known as Lord Hay) be sent on a mission of diplomacy. Donne was commissioned by the King to escort the Viscount with the hope of benefiting his health.

The entourage left Dover on May 13, 1619, and after an extended journey to Brussels, Cologne, Frankfort, Vienna, the Tyrol, Nuremburg, and The Hague, they returned to England and Donne resumed his duties at Lincoln's Inn, greatly restored in health and mind.

On November 19, 1621, Donne was elected Dean of St. Paul's. Walton writes of the appointment in his inimitable way: "The King sent to Dr. Donne, and appointed him to attend him at dinner the next day. When his Majesty was sat down, before he had any meat, he said after his pleasant manner, 'Dr. Donne, I have invited you to dinner, and, though you sit not down with me,

1. Walton p. 83



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I. Walton p. 83



yet I will carve to you of a dish which I know you love well; for knowing you love London, I do therefore make you Dean of St. Paul's; and when I have dined, then do you take your beloved dish home to your study, say grace there to your self, and much good may it do you."<sup>1</sup>

The Deanery brought considerable wealth to John Donne, and in 1621, when Sir George More made offer to pay the usual quarterly interest, Donne refused to take it.

In February, 1622, we find this announcement made to the Benchers at Lincoln's Inn on the occasion of Donne's resignation:

"Mr. Doctor Donne being lately advanced by the King's Majesty to the Deanery of St. Paul's, by reason whereof he cannot conveniently supply the place of a public preacher of God's Word in this House, as formerly he have done, in signification of the continuance of his love to this Society hath now, at this council, presented to the Members of the Bench, as a free gift from him, six volumes of the Bible, with the comment of Lyra, etc., and the Glosse, etc., which volumes were accordingly received and delivered unto Mr. Foster, one of the members of the Bench and now member of the Library, there to be kept to the use of the House. And the Members of the Bench acknowledging, this and many others, the kind and loving respects of the said Mr. Doctor Donne towards them, whereof they have had good experience, have now entered into consideration of some fitting retribution to express their thankful remembrance of



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him. And to the end it may appear that though they are glad of his preferment, yet being loath wholly to part with him, and that he may at his pleasure and convenient leisure repair to this House, being a worthy member thereof, and be no stranger here, have thought fit, and with one voice and assent have so ordered that the said Mr. Doctor Donne shall continue his chamber in this House which he now hath, as a Bencher of this House, with such privileges touching the same as the Members of the Bench now have and ought to have for their several and <sup>1</sup> respective chambers in this House."

At the time of his appointment to the Deanery of St. Paul, it had been the custom that the sermons on Sunday afternoons be delivered by selected preachers from outside the parish.

Donne changed this, and saw to it that the term-time sermons be preached by himself or by clerics residing at St. Paul's. "The Chapter of St. Paul's," Gosse says, "consisted of thirty prebendaries, of whom the Dean was one, and the duties of these officials were definitely laid down by the cathedral <sup>2</sup> statutes."

At the end of October, 1623, Donne suffered one of his most threatening attacks of sickness. The king dispatched his own physician to his bedside, and for weeks the life of the Dean was dangerously near the brink. Despite his illness he wrote feverishly--his imagination greatly heightened as his disease grew worse. After recovering from this attack, Donne continued his preachings. In May of 1625 and continuing

1. Gosse Vol. II p. 154 f.

2. Gosse Vol. II p. 159



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It was about this time that he began the tolling of his own death knell. On his return to the pulpit in 1626 he chose as his text [most appropriately after the ravishes wrought by the plague] "For there was not a home where there was not one dead." In fact, a premonition of his passing was so much with him, and his mind was so eager for new adventures, that he caused himself to be wrapped in his shroud and painted in a death-like pose.

He was made vicar of St. Dunstan's in March, 1624. He preached his first sermon here on April 11, 1624. He slips from our view now for several months. There seems to be no record that Donne preached to James I during the winter and spring (1625) preceding the King's death.

After coronation the new king, Charles I, remained a week shut up in St. Joseph's Palace, and on April 2nd, commanded Donne to preach to him the following Sunday. The king, only twenty-five years old, was an insecure patron in the eyes of John Donne. However, this concern was dissipated by the king's commendation of his April 3rd sermon, and an expression of desire by the monarch that the sermon be published as it was under the title, "The First Sermon preached to King Charles."



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This year also saw the earliest collection of his works, "From Sermons upon Special Occasions."

The popularity of Donne as a preacher reached its apex in 1626, and he held his fame until 1631, when he died. He was unrivaled in all England, and his sermonizings before the king were occasions of great public attraction.

Donne's mother who had been living with him at the Deanery, died on June 8, 1627. This death seemed to start many of Donne's friends toward Death's door. His friends fell away rapidly, his very true Christopher Brooke dying in 1628. Donne came to know Walton at this time.

On Christmas Day, 1628, Donne preached at St. Paul's and from this time on for several months, resumed his London duties. As far as can be learned, Donne preached avidly until the beginning of 1629, when in May he broke down, and for the next six months he disappeared from us.

It is odd that during his closing years, when he was at the peak of his popularity, his activities are veiled from us. He preached his last sermon at St. Paul's on Easter Sunday, March 28, 1630, and at Court "in Lent to the King" on the 23rd of April, 1630.

On the thirteenth of December, Donne drew up his will, a long elaborate document.

He came back to London, and on being examined by Dr. Simeon Fox, was told that, "by cordials and drinking milk twenty<sup>1</sup> days together there was a probability of his restoration."

1. Gosse Vol. II p. 275



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Donne seems to have had a distaste for milk, and "he passionately denied to drink it."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Fox suggested that Donne not leave the world without having made preparation for a monument to himself in his Cathedral. The Dean yielded, and Walton tells us "A monument being resolved upon, Dr. Donne sent for a Carver to make for him in wood the figure of an urn, giving him directions for the compass and height of it; and to bring with it a board, of just the height of his body. These being got, then without delay a choice painter was got to be in readiness to draw his picture, which was taken as followeth.-Several charcoal fires being first made in his large study, he brought with him into that place his winding-sheet in his hand, and having put off all his clothes, had this sheet put on him, and so tied with knots at his head and feet, and his hands so placed as dead bodies are usually fitted, to be shrouded and put into their coffin, or grave. Upon this urn he thus stood, with his eyes shut, and with so much of the sheet turned aside as might show his lean, pale, and death-like face, which was purposely turned towards the east, from whence he expected the second coming of his and our Saviour Jesus. In this posture he was drawn at his just height; and when the picture was fully finished, he caused it to be set by his bedside, where it continued and became his hourly object till his death, and was then given to his dearest friend and executor Dr. Henry King, then chief residentiary of St. Paul's, who caused him to be thus carved in one entire

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piece of white marble, as it now stands in that church; and by Dr. Donne's own appointment." His epitaph was written.

Five weeks seem to have passed between Donne's last sermon and his finally taking to bed. "He was buried in that place of St. Paul's Church which he had appointed for that use some years<sup>1</sup> before his death....."

His funeral sermon was preached by Archbishop Laud according to Sir Lucius Carey. The burial was attended by the most distinguished congregation of the laity and the poets were "chief mourners at his hearse."

Gosse called Donne "The most undulating, the most diverse<sup>2</sup> of human beings." To be sure, these words of description are well chosen, but are not these qualities the very ones that constitute the interesting and intriguing life? Are not most geniuses ever "undulating" and is not their diverseness the very quality that merits them place among the outstanding? The diverseness takes the form of going apart from the usual and attaining the seemingly unattainable. Donne had genius and he employed that genius in a complacent effort, mighty in its individuality, to coordinate real poetry with real life, and to free poetry from a too ornate kind of embellishment which tended toward insincerity. In his effort, John Donne succeeded and it is that success which is now being rightfully, though belatedly, accredited to him.

1. Gosse vol. II p. 284

2. ibid p. 290



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### Chapter III

#### Reflections of Donne's Life on Poems

##### "A King Who Ruled as He Thought"

It would be a dangerous move to take the poems of Donne, particularly his earlier poems, as mirroring his life. If this were done, one would almost be obligated to contend and believe that only a poet's own experiences are reflected in his writings, and this is hazardous because it denies the true scope of a poet's genius.

When considering John Donne we are concerned with a very complex character who experienced about everything that the world had to proffer. Donne, I believe, accepted each offer willingly--he loved life (in his earlier days), he wanted to and he did drink deep of all it presented. His body, mind, and soul ran a gamut of happenings that would thoroughly test the most rugged of persons. Fancy, then, how the very sensitive Donne reacted to these incidents of body, mind, and soul.

By listing the outstanding features of Donne's life, let us try to see how each was reflected in his poetry. In this chapter we shall consider Donne only in a very general way, leaving for later and more detailed concern the direct productions that were inspired, or better, provoked by various phases of the man's life. However, we shall try to point out how circumstances forced him to write or mirror not only those ideas that sprang spontaneously from the soul of the poet but also those which pleaded vainly for patronage, friends, and money. Hence, in



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his writings we shall see the playing a dual role--a characterization he was unable to shed until his deanery days.

All through his life Donne was a rebel, and his spirit of rebellion cost him and his not only life but also peace of mind and advancement in things material. Although this idea of dissatisfaction was innate in Donne, it was not original. His mother's family as was mentioned in the previous chapter, long suffered for their beliefs in Catholicism. Although most of John Donne's literary sufferings, like his fame, were posthumous, nevertheless, he strove bravely to remake the literary fancies of his day. By actual test let us see how much justification can be found in a theory such as that just promulgated.

To be sure the erudite works of John Donne can in part be traced, as has been suggested, to his parentage. The sensuousness of his verse can be found in the ancestry of his father. We are told that the Welsh are extremely alive to all sense emotions, and truly John Donne displayed this beyond question in his writings. The literary and religious background supplied to Donne by his mother are too commonly known to require further elaboration. Suffice it to say that John Heywood and Sir Thomas More are very evident, periodically, in Donne's poems. Donne emulated Heywood in his originality, in the creations he concocted of stanzaic forms and also in what he wrote not to satisfy an audience or a following, but to express his concepts of the world as it was. The creative spirit evinced by Sir Thomas More in writing his "Utopia", the masterpiece of English humanism, is surely to be found in the works of Donne.



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Emile Legouis has this to say about More's "Utopia"; "Better than  
any book it marks the new turning in the paths of thought."<sup>1</sup>

What Legouis says for "Utopia", I would say for Donne's poetry, namely, that it is by his rebellious expression that Donne changed the monotonous angelic chant of the Elizabethian sonneteers of not only pedestaled woman but also society in general.

mm More was in revolt against the spirit of chivalry, Donne was in revolt against the spirit of lavish glorification of love (and all its retinue). Sir Thomas More wrote his works in Latin, not for the commoners of his time but for the learned. Donne wrote not to Elizabethan lovers of the fanciful, not to any kind, but simply to a selected few friends who probably felt as Donne did that exaggeration had strained itself in an attempt to keep pace with the demands made on it by the literateurs. It is quite evident from a perusal of sixteenth and seventeenth century poetry that each writer strove to out-do his compatriots.

With such a background and heritage, we are not surprised to see the first signs of rebellion in John Donne while at Oxford, when, holding fast to the tenets of his religion, he refused the privilege of taking a degree because of the required oath. This same revolt he repeated at Cambridge, and for the same reason. We discover his first rebellion against the fashions literature early in his residence at Lincoln's Inn, when he wrote at least three of his satires, which stung with

1. A History of English Literature, Legouis & Cazamian (1929)  
p. 209



Edith Legouis has this to say about More's "Utopia": "Better than any book it marks the new turning in the path of thought."

What Legouis says for "Utopia", I would say for Donne's poetry, namely, that it is by his rebellious expression that Donne

changed the monotonous angelic chant of the Elizabethan sonneteers of not only pedestaled women but also society in general.

More was in revolt against the spirit of civility, Donne was in revolt against the spirit of lavish glorification of love

(and all its retinue). Sir Thomas More wrote his works in Latin, not for the commoners of his time but for the learned.

Donne wrote not to Elizabethan lovers of the fanciful, not to any kind, but simply to a selected few friends who probably felt

as Donne did that exaggeration had attained itself in an attempt to keep pace with the demands made on it by the literateurs.

It is quite evident from a perusal of sixteenth and seventeenth century poetry that each writer strove to out-do his competitor.

rites.

With such a background and heritage, we are not surprised

to see the first signs of rebellion in John Donne while at

Oxford, when, holding fast to the tenets of his religion, he

refused the privilege of taking a degree because of the

required oath. This same revolt he repeated at Cambridge, and

for the same reason. We discover his first rebellion against

the fashion literature early in his residence at Lincoln's Inn,

when he wrote at least three of his satires, which stand with

1. A History of English Literature, Legouis & Cazamian (1929)



boyish bitterness. Let it be said that Donne had saturated his mind in the literature of the time--but he could not relish it. He revolted against its theme.<sup>1</sup> Need it be said that this was the golden epoch of poetic production in England? Considering just a few years let us enumerate some of the pieces that graced the period when Donne was concerned about his satires. In 1582 appeared Nash's "Pierce Penniless"; in 1593, Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" also Drayton's "Shepherd's Garland;" in 1594, Greene's "Orlando Furioso," Lyly's "Mother Bombie," and Shakespeare's "Lucrece". and in 1595, Spenser's "Astrophel", Amoretti" and "Epithalamium." None the less for their greatness, these productions could not subdue the rebel heart of Donne.

He shows his passion of revolt from the writings of the myriads of sonneteers of this period in his poem "Loves Alchymie."

"Some that have deeper digg'd loves Myne than I  
Say, where his centrique happinesse doth lie;  
I have lov'd, and got, and told,  
But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,  
I should not finde that hidden mysterie;

Oh, 'tis imposture all;  
And as no chymique yet th' Elixar got,  
But glorifies his pregnant pot,  
If by the way to him befall

Some odoriferous thing, or medicinall,  
So, lovers dreame a rich and long delight,  
But Get a winter-seeming summers night

Our ease, our thrift, our honor, and our day,  
Shall we, for this vaine Bubles shadow pay?

Ends love in this, that my man,  
Can be as happy' as I can; If he can  
Endure the short scorne of a Bridegroomes play?

'Tis not the bodies marry, but the mindes,  
Which he in her Angelique Fundes,  
Would sweare as justly, that he heares,

<sup>1</sup>most Note singular is purposely used since "love" dominates almost all the poetic writings of the period.



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"Some that have deeper died's loves than I  
Say, where his centric happiness doth lie;  
I have lov'd, and got, and sold,  
But should I love, get, sell, till I was old,  
I should not find that hidden mystery;  
Oh, 'tis impossible all;  
And as no cynic yet th' Elixer got,  
But glorifies his pregnant pot,  
If by the way to him detail  
Some odorous thing, or medicinal,  
So, lovers dream a rich and long delight,  
But get a winter-summer's night  
Our ease, our thrift, our honor, and our day,  
Shall we, for this vain Ruler shadow pay?  
Nada love in this, what my task,  
Can be as happy, as I can; if he can  
Endure the short season of a Bridgroom's play?  
'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds,  
Which he in her angelique Ranges,  
Would swear as truly, that he hears,  
Note singular is purposely used since "love" dominates almost all the poetic writings of the period.



In that dayes rude hoarse minstralsey, the spheares.  
 Hope not for minde in women; at their best  
 Sweetnesse and wit, they'are but Mummy, possest."

The date of composition of Donne's satires is fairly well  
<sup>1</sup>  
 determined; it is generally thought that they existed in part,  
 at least, as early as 1593. In his satires he turns to his  
 favorite topic of discussion, one that resounds throughout all  
 of his writings, namely, man and man's society. A hurried  
 glance over the table of contents of any collection of his  
 poems indicates unfailingly that he sees and studies men in  
 every particular circumstance. Even his satires are directed  
 at the activities of man. In the first satire which is direct-  
 ed at London society, Donne satirizes the instability of his  
 companion (a talkative man-about-town) and is only too pleased  
 to return to his "few bookes." The beginning of the poem,  
 "Away thou fondling motley humorist," brings to mind the start  
 of "Il Penseroso." It is probable that poems of this kind were  
 written by Donne after he had spent a few years roaming the  
 quiet midnight streets of London. The many conflicts which  
 Donne's family had in defending the Roman faith, particularly  
 the one sad incident which resulted in Henry Donne's death,  
 stimulated the writing of Satires II and III, which deal with  
 lawyers and religion.

Instead of singing grand praises to woman as was the wont  
 of his forerunners, Donne, the rebel, says in the closing  
 stanza of his much-quoted poem, "Goe and Catch a Falling Starr"

1.. John Donne-Complete Poetry and Selected Prose--Edited by  
 John Hayward-Random House-New York 1932, page 120.







"If thou findest one, (a woman) let mee know,  
 Such a Pilgrimage were sweet;  
 Yet doe not, I would not goe,  
 Though at next doore wee might meet  
 Though shee were true, when you met her,  
 And last, till you write your letter,  
     Yet shee  
     Will bee  
 False, ere I come, to two, or three."

This does not sound like the 82nd sonnet of Spenser for instance

"Joy of my life! full oft for loving you  
 I blesse my lot, that was so lucky placed:  
 But then the more your owne mishap I rew,  
 That are so much by so meane love embased  
 For, had the equall heavens so much you graced  
 In this as in the rest, ye mote invent  
 Som heavenly unit, whose verse could have enchased  
 Your glorious name in golden merriment.

"But since ye deigned so goodly to relent  
 To me your thrall, in whom is little worth,  
 That little, that I am, shall all be spent  
 In setting your immortall prayes forth;  
 Whose lofty argument, uplifting me,  
 Shall lift you up unto an high degree."

We have seen in our cursory examination that his very cynical pieces of literature, and his satiric invectives against certain phases of society are the product of his university and Lincoln's Inn days.

Adhering to our original premise that Donne consciously wanted to go counter to all things conventional, let us pass to the next main effect that life had on his poetry. After securing a position in the service of Sir Thomas Egerton, Donne again showed his rebellious blood by going directly against convention and the usual procedures of the time by falling in love and secretly marrying the favorite niece of the second Lady Egerton. It seems apparent that one of two explanations



"If thou findest one, (a woman) let me know,  
 Such a thing were sweet;  
 Yet dost not, I would not go,  
 Though at next door was might meet  
 Though she were true, when you met her,  
 And I, till you write your letter,  
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"Joy of my life! full oft for loving you  
 I please my lot, that way be lucky pleased;  
 But then the more your own mischance I see,  
 That ere so much by so many love embraced  
 For, had the equal heavens so much you greased  
 In this as in the rest, ye more invent  
 Som heavenly salt, whose virtue could have enhanced  
 Your glorious name in golden marriage."

"But since ye designed so goodly to reward  
 To me your shall, in whom is little worth,  
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can account for Donne's behavior. Either he was sincerely in love with Anne More and desired her even more than the advancement and security offered by Sir Thomas's service, or he felt that by such an intimate connection with a member of Egerton's household lifelong position and favor would be his. The folly of the latter explanation becomes quite obvious in the light of the beautiful love poetry that flowed from his so recently embittered pen.

"Sweetest love, I do not goe,  
For wearinesse of thee,  
Nor in hope the world can show  
A fitter love for thee;  
But since that I  
Must dye at last, 'tis best,  
To use my selfe in jest  
Thus be fain'd deaths to dye;

.....  
When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not winde,  
But sigh'st my soule away,  
When thou weep'st, unkindly kinde,  
My life's blood doth decay,  
It cannot bee  
That thou lov'st mee, as thou say'st,  
If in thine my life thou waste,  
That art the best of mee.

Let not thy divining heart  
Forethinke me any ill,  
Destiny may take thy part,  
And may thy feares fulfill,  
But thinke that wee  
Are but turn'd aside to sleepe;  
They who one another keepe  
Alive, ne'r parted bee."

Following his marriage, Donne spent a few years in utter distraction and disappointment. His child-wife was kept from him by her stubborn, over-wrought father, who undoubtedly was more provoked at his loss of connexion with Egerton's household than with the marriage of his daughter to Egerton's secretary.



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 To use my selfe in least  
 Thus be thine's death to use;

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 When thou shalt, thou shalt not winde,  
 But shalt at my side away,  
 When thou weep'st, unkindly kinde,  
 My life's blood both decay,  
 It cannot bee  
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 If in time my life thou waste,  
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Let not thy dying heart  
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 Dying may take thy part,  
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However, we find that Donne, during this period, let fall from him forever the tendency to the debauchery and cynicism of Jack Donne's years. His poetic singings take on a more penitent air--in fact, contrary to the attitude of other writers, I believe his poetry becomes "bread and butter" poetry.

John Donne wrote with the hope of securing patronage, or a preferment at Court, or he wrote to say "thank you," to some beneficent friend.

His "Anatomy of the World", in which he so distastefully lavishes praise on Elizabeth Drury whom he had never even seen, is almost too effusive a compensation for Sir Robert Drury's kind patronage. In fact, Donne is so willing to pay his material debts with literary outpourings that he promises a poem on each anniversary of Miss Drury's death and he hopes (at the beginning of the second poem "The Progress of the Soule") that his example of writing a poem each year in her honor will be continued by future poets and in this way:

"Those Hymes thy issue, may increase so long,  
As till God's great Venite change the song."

The extravagances displayed in the poems to Miss Drury so vexed the Countess of Bedford and others of Donne's more choice friends--benefactors all--that we find him writing verse letters to her, no doubt to assuage her dissatisfaction and to preserve her good wishes.

Again, his association with Magdalen Herbert, which began in 1607, evoked some of his finer, less cynical, more intensely personal poems. This is particularly true of those classed as



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divine poems. Mrs. Herbert was kind and motherly to the worried Donne, and to her he could unfold his altered heart--a heart that now was eager to celebrate in verse, and a more lasting verse, the fullness and comfort of a woman's heart, which in his earlier works he had so vociferously denied. Fausset tells us that she was a "bountiful benefactor--and when more exalted patronesses failed him he never turned to her in vain."

When Sir Robert Drury wanted to take Donne abroad with him in 1611, Anne then with child (her eighth), was forced to stay in England. To console her he wrote his beautiful lyrical poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" which among its exquisite lines has the famed conceit of the lovers likened to compasses. Even in the beauty of such lines as the following we are aware that Donne is stirred to composition by a desire to compensate for the necessity to leave Anne Donne behind him by presenting her with a nicely chiseled farewell that precludes the mourning which might have caused the dutiful Donne to forego his trip abroad.

"So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No teare--floods, nor sigh--tempests more,  
T'were prophanation of our joyes  
To tell the layetie our love,

.....

Our two soules therefore, which are one,  
Though I must goe, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to avery thinnesse beate."

Donne was quite weary of the role of Mendicent which he was forced to play for such a long time. Fausset tells us that "With agitated servility Donne commended himself to the memory of every Lord and Lady of his acquaintance, and at last, as the



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 1. John Donne, *Life of Donne*, Fausset, 143



year (1614) advanced without any sign of a secular move on  
<sup>1</sup>  
 Somerset's part," (the first person Donne sought to obtain for  
 him religious preferment), he reverted despairingly to his  
 original plea" which was religious favor. He had begged at  
 Court--he had begged of his Lady of Twickenham--he had begged  
 of Sir Robert More--he had begged of Mrs. Herbert--he had lived  
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 youth, the reprisals he experienced after marriage--and the  
 mendicant years from 1601 until his admission to the Anglican  
 clergy, wrote full-throated, soul-stirring, religiously inspired  
 poetry which bore deep tracings of his early Catholic training.

The richest writings of Donne's literary career are his  
 Holy Sonnets--thirty-nine in number and immeasurable in worth  
 and exquisiteness. The freedom of Donne from the perils of  
 poverty is reflected in the resonant, reverberating poetry of  
 his years as a cleric. His themes are, as the titles suggest,  
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 Samuel Johnson, freed of patrons and freed of the forced flat-  
 tery that ornamented many of his earlier writings.

"La Corona" and "Holy Sonnets" are true expressions of  
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1. John Donne, Hugh I. Anson, Revised, page 215



fervent devotion to God and Church for the love and sincerity formerly paid to his wife.

In Sonnet XVII we read the following:

"Since she whom I lov'd hath paid her last debt  
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is bad,  
And her Soule early into heaven ravished,  
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set."

He certainly adhered to his devotions to Church and within a few days of his death he composed a very beautiful poem which ties together the youthful debauchee, Jack Donne, with the staid, saintly, remorseful Dr. Donne of St. Paul's. The poem sings of physicians and cosmographers, maps, discoveries, straits, the Pacific Sea, Eastern riches; countering these toys of his earlier poetry, we find Japhet, Cham, and Sem of the Old Testament--Paradise, Christ and Calvarie of the New Testament. The two extremes of the poet's life are united in this one beautiful "Hymne To God, My God, In my Sicknesse."

No one realized more than Donne the real value of the work of the great writers of his time--but, like a true revolutionist, he knew them well, mentioned them seldom--and rebuked them freely. His was a written taunt in which he conveyed to his circle of friends his distaste for the conventions of literary subject matter, treatment and form--all of which were strictly aped by the many writers of the period. John Donne's nature, training, and intellect would not permit him to follow calmly and docilely in the wake of others. He was a pioneer, confident of his own resources and ready to match them with all comers. He made no boast, he promised no change, but he quietly went



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about his glorious task of saving literary forms from the purgatory of sameness and monotony to which they were headed. John Donne's work was purposely planned, unobtrusively done, but never yet satisfactorily evaluated. Its true worth, its influence and its greatness are still unfathomed.

Charles and George and Edmund Spenser "as equally sincere, even if we do not find them all equally conscious." No doubt they are "sincere," but after all we may be most sincere and still be far from being truthful or even biographical. John Donne, I think, was a very sincere person during most of his life, but he was also a sternly oppressed man for several years and in a sincere effort to throw off this oppression he put to use his greatest attribute, namely, the ability to preach, and he strove to talk himself out of poverty and self-preference and into a satisfactory berth. John Donne was practical minded and realized, particularly after his marriage and his concurrent discharge by Epworth, that it was quite obligatory that he support his fast increasing family. Even in his poetry, especially in his choice of subjects, we see Donne's practicality. Science, medicine, law, and other everyday themes find voiced expression in his writings.

Donne's chief fault, his involved style, can be partially explained by his conversational method of verse writing. He writes as many talk--understandably but sagely. Marie Perle, in his "Donne's Relation to the Poetry of his Time," in speaking of "The Dream" tells us that "there is hardly a line in Donne's poem which makes sense by itself." The Metaphysical Poets--Donne. Herbert. Vaughan. Traherne.



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## Chapter IV

### The Earlier Poems of John Donne

"Both faire and browne."

It has been said by Leishman that we should regard all the Elegies and Songs and Sonnets of Donne "as equally sincere,<sup>1</sup> even if we do not find them all equally congenial." No doubt they are "sincere," but after all one may be most sincere and still be far from being truthful or even biographical. John Donne, I think, was a very sincere person during most of his life, but he was also a sternly oppressed man for several years and in a sincere effort to throw off this oppression he put to use his greatest attribute, namely, the ability to preach, and he strove to talk himself out of poverty and non-preferment and into a satisfactory berth. John Donne was practical minded and realized, particularly after his marriage and his concurrent discharge by Egerton, that it was quite obligatory that he support his fast increasing family. Even in his poetry, especially in his choice of subjects, we see Donne's practicality. Science, medicine, travel, and other everyday themes find voiced expression in his writings.

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1. The Metaphysical Poets-Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne,



#### Chapter IV

#### The Earlier Poems of John Donne

"Both true and brave."

It has been said by Leishman that we should regard all the Elegies and Songs and Sonnets of Donne "as equally sincere, even if we do not find them all equally congenial." No doubt they are "sincere," but after all one may be most sincere and still be far from being truthful or even biographical. John Donne, I think, was a very sincere person during most of his life, but he was also a eternally oppressed man for several years and in a sincere effort to throw off this oppression he put to use his greatest attribute, namely, the ability to preach, and he strove to talk himself out of poverty and non-preference and into a satisfactory berth. John Donne was practical minded and realized, particularly after his marriage and his concurrent discharge by Egerton, that it was quite obligatory that he support his fast increasing family. Even in his poetry, especially in his choice of subjects, we see Donne's practicality. Science, medicine, travel, and other everyday themes find voiced expression in his writings. Donne's chief fault, his involved style, can be partially explained by his conversational method of verse writing. He writes as many talk-undoubtedly but vaguely. Mario Prae, in his "Donne's Relation to the Poetry of His Time," in speaking of "The Dream" tells us that "there is hardly a line in Donne's poem which makes sense by itself." The Metaphysical Poets-Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne,



hardly a line in Donne's poem which makes sense by itself, or can claim the power of emblazoning in a musical cadence a whole state of mind." Praz adds that "the sense is rounded off only at the end of the stanza, or rather at the end of the poem: the unit is not the line, as in many of the sonneteers, and not even the stanza, but the entire poem.<sup>1</sup>" It is this novelty of delayed and climactic explanation in Donne's poetic form which makes so many of his potential readers revolt from him. We are too used to the staid patterns and forms, as were the Elizabethans, to fully credit a new attempt, and a good one, put forth by Donne three centuries ago.

By grouping and analyzing representative pieces of his work, I hope to point out the innumerable devices-poetical, mental, and philosophical which Donne uses to display his erudition, and to intentionally confound his reader and by confounding him, shock him into consciousness of the stilted literary customs of the day. The present consideration will forego his writings done after his ministry begins.

Another student, Gamaliel Bradford, in his "A Naturalist of Souls" says that Donne is often unintelligible, wantonly so. "He flings down his ideas before you like a tangled skein; you meddle with it at your peril."<sup>2</sup> Bradford then points out that Donne vies with Shakspeare in his ambiguity.

by J. B. Leishman. Oxford. At the Clarendon Press, 1934. pp 12-13

1. A Garland for John Donne--Edited by Theodore Spencer, Cambridge. Harvard University Press, 1931, p. 57

2. A Naturalist of Souls, Studies in Psychography, by Gamaliel Bradford. Dodd, Mead and Company. 1917. P. 40



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can claim the power of sublimating in a magical or divine

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all only at the end of the poem, or rather at the end of the

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and not even in "The Canonization," but the whole poem. It is this

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1. A Canonization for John Donne, edited by Theodore Brown,

Cambridge. Harvard University Press, 1911. p. 27

2. A History of the Canonization, edited by Bradford, by



But what Bradford forgets is that Donne was revolting against the detail-laden sonnets and poems of his time in which everything was most minutely thought out for the reader quite as the modern movie allows of no use of one's own imagination. Donne throws his reader a tangled skein, but if attacked carefully and thoughtfully the quality and texture of the yarn will be well worth the undoing.

Let us see how this works out in some of his poetry. For our own convenience we shall group together like pieces and consider them jointly. The most acceptable chronological order of the poems is that of Professor Grierson, and I shall follow that as given in the Random House edition of Donne's Poetical Works. The Songs and Sonnets, the Satires and the Elegies are in one grouping because they are the poems of Donne's youth. It may be well to note here that in the 1081 lines in the category of Songs and Sonnets there is not one real sonnet. But let it be added at once that Donne, nevertheless, rescued the sonnet from love, by giving it new life. This he accomplished with his "Holy Sonnets" in which he frankly and openly decided to use the sonnet for topics other than love. The English sonnet had been a love song from the time of Wyatt up to Donne. Spenser and Drayton had put their sonnets into cycles, this being possible because of the unified theme that permeated all the poems. Milton, however, followed Donne in his use of other topics for sonnets. After this there were no sonnets for one hundred and fifty years



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until Wordsworth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The word "elegy" did not mean to Donne what it conveys to us. There is little funereal about his elegies, but he used the term because he felt that his couplets rendered the effect of the elegiac measure.

In his early poetry Donne is still youthful enough to be unaffected by the mould into which he was later to be forced. He sang the songs of any Elizabethan youth, as he strove for recognition about the court. Donne sang of "love," for "love" was an all important topic in Elizabeth's England.

In the poem "The Good - Morrow" we see John Donne as a youthful moralizer who treats the topic of love quite solemnly, respectfully, and reverently, particularly when considered in view of some of his other poems and also his age.

In stanza one we have two souls represented as asleep, that is, unaware of a dormant but mutual love; this may be paralleled to the sun at rest before daybreak.

In stanza two the poet speaks of the "waking soules" which are now in love and, like the sun, are mutually beneficent and make every little space "an everywhere." Love needs no discoverers nor maps for it is satisfied with itself. It discovers itself to those concerned.

The third stanza contains the conceit of a person's eye reflecting the face of another when one looks into another's eye. Then we find the little preaching of Dr. Donne of later years--that the "true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest."



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"Plaine hearts," like love, are universal in the mind of Donne; there is no north or west, it is perfectly universal because the loves are mutual and therefore can never die.

The stanzaic form and the number of syllables in each line shall be reserved for a later discussion and enumeration.

In these earlier efforts Donne employs some alliteration but it is by no means abundant.

A note of cynicism may be sensed as one reads the poem called "The Song," but without a doubt Donne realized, as most young people do, that being cynical results in securing attention, and youth craves just that. The "strange sights" mentioned in the second stanza are enumerated in the first, but regardless of how difficult it would be to discover the suggested items, to find "a woman true, and faire" is utterly out of reason. It is interesting to note that possession of a mandrake, which Donne mentioned in stanza one, was forbidden by law in the reign of Henry VIII. We are told that the mandrake, so-called because its roots resemble the human body, when torn from the ground uttered a cry so terrible that the hearer was driven insane. After stressing the fruitlessness of trying to find a "true woman," Donne temptingly leads on the reader by saying, "If thou findest one, let mee know," but after a careful heightening of suspense which is truly illustrative of Donne's climactic technic, the poet drops his reader, (as he often does in his last line) to an unexpected conclusion which startles him. The youthful



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Donne flaunts his disregard of love and the feminine as he triumphantly leads us through this poetic experience.

The impetuous youth of Donne together with a studied ironic tempo mark "Woman's Constancy" as of his early days. He gloried, as was suggested earlier in this paper, in the consternation which such a poem as this created among his friends. Yet, at the same time, Donne is again evincing his distaste for the artificial, and ill-founded glorification of women. The surprise ending found in the last line is quite typical and it rounds out the sense of the entire piece.

Leishman suggests that "The Undertaking" was written<sup>1</sup> "toward the beginning of Donne's love for Anne More." He was, no doubt, in the employ of Sir Thomas Egerton and proudly he said of himself that:

"I have done one braver thing  
Than all the Worthies did,  
And yet a braver thence doth spring,  
Which is, to keepe that hid."

Donne's second brave act was to keep from common knowledge his love for Lady Egerton's favorite niece. If this were so Donne probably felt that by wedding one of the Lord Keeper's family, preferment would have been his.

The "Worthies" whom Donne mentions in the first and last stanzas vary not only in number but also in the names of those so listed. The nine usually mentioned are Joshua, David, Judas Maccabaeus, Hector, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon.

1. Leishman. Page 29.



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Again showing how distrustful he was wont to be of the faithfulness of women he says:

"If, as I have you also doe  
Vertue 'attir'd in woman see,  
And dare love that, and say so too,  
And forget the Hee and Shee:

And if this love, though placed so,  
From prophane men you hide,  
Which will no faith on this bestow,  
Or, if they doe, deride:

Then you have done a braver thing  
Than all the Worthies did;  
And a braver thence will spring,  
Which is, to keepe that hid."

In other words Donne praises himself doubly, first for what he himself did, and then for being a duplicate of another person's reactions after he hath found loveliness within.

Still opposing the conventions of his day, we find Donne in the poem "The Sunne Rising," ranting at the sun which all writers prior to this time had mentioned only with prayerful devotion. Donne calls the sun a "Busie old foole," and later in the poem he terms it a "sawcy pedantique wretch."

He begs to be left alone with his love, (in this case it is Anne More, I hope) and bids the sun "goe chide" tardy school-boys and ill-tempered apprentices. "Love," Donne tells us,

"No season knowes, nor clyme,  
Nor hours, dayes, moneths, which are the  
rags of time."

The impassioned speech of a young man who has finally found true love is crystalized for us in the concluding stanza where Donne declares that royalty, science and all the



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important things of the world are leveled before the might of love, in fact the poet asserts that "Nothing else is."

Reverting to a favorite idea of his, the poet tells us in words addressed to the sun,

"Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;  
This bed thy center is, these walls thy spheare."

From this we again glean Donne's conception of love, it is the "be-all and the end-all," love needs no complement, it is universal, it is independent of all else, in truth, the very sun makes its orbit around a pair of lovers.

In "The Indifferent" Donne praises the inconstancy of women and also glories in his own inconstancy. The poem is, therefore, well studied in conjunction with "Womans Constancy;" both reverberate to the same ribaldry of Donne's youth prior to his meeting with Anne More.

Stanza one of "The Indifferent" presents a series of contrasts; "abundance" and "want," "one who loves lonesness," and one who loves "masks and plays," "country" and "town," "beleeves" and "tries," she who "weepes," and she who is as if "in dry corke."

Venus is dealt with in true Donnean fashion when the poet sings,

"Venus heard me sigh this song,  
And by Loves sweetest Part, Variety, she swore,  
She heard not this till now; and that it should be  
so no more.  
She went, examin'd, and return'd ere long,  
And said, alas, Some two or three  
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But I have told them, since you will be true,



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You shall be true to them, who 'are false to you."

Once more he goes contrary to the Venus cult of his time when he says he can love "both faire and brown." The conventional ideal of beauty in the Elizabethan era was satisfied by the fair-haired or blondes.

One readily notices that this poem has the ending so typical of the songs written by Donne during this period of his life. He leads the reader to an obvious conclusion and in a terse line or two at the end of the poem he puts forth an entirely contrary viewpoint.

The content of "The Canonization" leads one to justifiably believe that it was written soon after his secret marriage to Anne More and probably while she was detained from her husband at the home of her intolerant father. A careful reading of the poem with this thought in mind will confirm its feasibility. The poem was probably meant to be a kind of dramatic monologue.

The sincere love and impetuosity of the converted Donne is beautifully depicted for us in this poem. The reckless Jack Donne is dying, no more is he willing to pass from love to love with no qualm, and without concern, if his love must be kept from him he is anxious to

"dye by it, if not live by love,  
And if unfit for tombes and hearse  
Our legend bee, if will be fit for verse;  
And if no peece of Chronicle wee prove,  
We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes;  
As well a well wrought urne becomes  
The greatest ashes, as halfe-acre tombes,  
And by these hymnes, all shall approve  
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Many feel that this poem is a drastic change from his previous stand on love, but adhering to an idea put forth earlier in this paper, that Donne's libertinism was studied and manufactured to shock his associates, we can conclude that true love swept all such jesting before it and left John Donne a staid, sensible, stolid devotee of the Venus he had but recently played.

It is well to note also that Donne impresses on his reader his intense concern for love by using the word at the end of the first and last lines of each of the five stanzas of the poem.

An interesting cross reference is seen in a contrast between Tennyson and Donne, each speaking of his own philosophy. Note the conclusions that each draws from his reasoning, and also mark the climactic turn which Donne gives in the last couplet of his lyric. This very pointed, epigrammatic twist is most appropriate for such a moralizing poem.

Tennyson says:

"I sometimes hold it half a sin  
To put in words the grief I feel:  
For words, like Nature, half reveal  
And half conceal the soul within.

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,  
A use in measured language lies;  
The sad mechanic exercise,  
Of dull narcotics, numbing pain.

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,  
Like coarsest clothes against the cold;  
But that large grief which these enfold  
Is given in outline and no more."



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Then Donne philosophizes in "The Triple Fool":

"I am two fooles, I know,  
For loving, and for saying so  
In whining Poetry;  
But where's that wiseman, that would not be I,  
If she would no deny?  
Then as th'earths inward narrow crooked lanes  
Do purge sea waters freftull salt away,  
I thought, if I could draw my paines,  
Through Rimes vexation, I should them allay.  
Griefe brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,  
For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse.

But when I have done so,  
Some man, his art and voice to show,  
Doth Set and sing my paine,  
And, by delighting many, frees againe  
Griefe, which verse did restraine.  
To Love, and Griefe tribute of Verse belongs,  
But not of such as pleases when 'tis read,  
Both are increased by such songs;  
For both their triumphs so are published,  
And I, which was two fooles, do so grow three;  
Who are a little wise, the best fooles bee."

The sameness of material or subject-matter and the very different method of treatment by the two poets is particularly apparent in the quotations given above.

It was mentioned in Chapter II that to appease the desire of Anne Donne to accompany her husband on the continental tour which he took in 1612 with Sir Robert Drury, Donne wrote a poem to her. Anne Donne was confined to bed at this time because of an illness which resulted from the birth of her eighth child. This poem, called "The Song," rings forth true tones of the devoted love of John Donne for his wife. He swings directly into his theme in the spirited lines of spontaneous worth:



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"Sweetest love, I do not goe,  
 For wearinesse of thee,  
 Nor in hope the world can show  
 A fitter Love for mee."

He pleads with his wife that he has more reason to reappear than the sun, who is ever returning. He then argues that if she spends time sighing and weeping, it is to his detriment because,

"When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind  
 But sigh'st my soul away,  
 When thou weep'st, unkindly kinde,  
 My lifes blood doth decay."

Donne reaches the apex of his argumentative lyrical powers when he assures Anne,

"They who one another keepe  
 Alive, he'r parted bee."

A notable feature of the poem "Breake of Day" is that it is the only one that is put into the mouth of a woman.

"Mr. Chambers," says Grierson, "has pointed out in his learned and delightful essay on the mediaeval lyrics that the popular as opposed to the courtly love-song was frequently put into the mouth of the woman." One has only to turn to Burns and the Scotch lyrists to find the same thing true. This song, "Breake of Day," is clearly descended from the popular "aube" or lyric dialogue of lovers parting at daybreak.

The poem displays well the wit and passion so effectively fused by Donne and which he employs to such advantage in brief works.

1. Donne's Poetical Works Edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson. Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1912. Vol. II. p. 22 (Commentary).



"Sweetest love, I do not goe,  
For weariness of thee,  
Nor do I hope the world can show  
A fitter love for mee."

He pleads with his wife that he has more reason to  
rejoice than the sun, who is ever returning. He then argues  
that if she spends time sighing and weeping, it is to his  
detriment because,

"When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind  
But sigh'st my soul away,  
When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,  
My lilies bleed both decay."

Dante reaches the apex of his argumentative lyrical  
powers when he answers Anne,

"They who one another keep  
Alive, he's parted bee."

A notable feature of the poem "Break of Day" is that it  
is the only one that is put into the mouth of a woman.  
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The poet takes the opportunity to scorn the man who, because of his falseness and weakness, wreaked his anger "on woman-kind" and set afoot the law that "One (woman) might one man know." Donne asks if the sun, moon, stars, birds, and animals are denied the privilege of having new lovers. Again he begs to know if ships are built to lie at anchor, or houses built to be locked and not used. The poet negatively answers his own questions and hurls the challenge to the world that

"Good is not good, unlesse  
A thousand it possesse,  
But doth wast with greedinesse."

Many of the allusions that Donne delights in are concentrated in this poem; love, woman, astronomy, ships and new lands (travel), but in their new settings they yield a new and bewitching light, as do most of Donne's repetitions.

In the poem "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" Donne resorts to his loved figures of mint, coins, and maps. He demonstrates clearly in this poem that he is able to set for himself a certain pattern of stanzaic form and hold himself, and, which is harder, his thought, to that pattern. Some difficulty seems to be experienced by many students of Donne in understanding the line:

"When a teare falls, that thou falls, which it bore."

If one realizes that the poet is using the conceit of the reflection of a person in a tear drop of another person, the comprehension of the line is made easy.

Each stanza is centered about a round object. First the







tear drop images a person; secondly "A round ball" when worked on a map maker images of the world; and thirdly, the moon "draws up water" to drown the lover in her tears. In this logical sequence of thought from the small to the large (from the tear drop to the moon) we see a splendid example of the methodical workings of Donne's mind. He writes his poetry with the same deftness and orderliness that we later find in his sermons and religious tracts.

Still keeping in mind the purpose of this section of my dissertation to show Donne's ready display of his erudition and also his revolt from the conventions of his time, let us pass to a consideration of "Loves Alchymie." Here Donne's thorough knowledge of that popular mediaeval science of alchemy is unfolded to us.

In the first line of the piece he employs his loved figure of the ambiguous "Myne." In this particular instance it is not not quite as many-sided as it is, for example, in "The Sunne Rising." Grierson informs us that according to Coleridge, "The use of the word mine specifically for mines of gold, silver, or precious stones is....particular to  
1  
Donne." Donne makes further use of this word in "LovesExchange"

"....and make more Mynes in the earth, then  
Quarries were before!

And also in "The Progresse of the Soule."

"And see at night thy westren land of myne."

Another part of his rejection of the mediaeval idea of woman is witnessed in the typical thought-laden, mind-  
1. Grierson. Vol. II. p. 13, (Commentary).







Provoking closing couplet:

"Hope not for minde in women, at their best  
Sweetnesse and wit, they're but mummy, possest."

The word "possest" is best translated "possessed" and the inference is that the "mummy" spoken of is possessed of the devil.

One is at a loss to know distinctly whether John Donne is a believer in alchemy or is conscious of its fruitlessness and dallies with it only for his poetic use. But at least we are prone to believe that he feels that women are made up of such elements that an alchemist and "his pregnant pot" would be unable to produce.

Donne brings together in "The Flea" remote ideas with the one intent and purpose of shocking his readers into attention. The entire substance of the poem is compressed into the first and second lines:

"Marke but this flea, and marke in this,  
How little that which thou deny'st me is."

Then, in rather coarse, man-about-town language, he strives to argue his mistress into allowing him the privilege she allows the flea. She has denied him intercourse because she fears the harm that may result. Yet the flea has enjoyed both the lovers and they are none the worse for the experience.

The opening verse of "The Baite" is in direct imitation of Marlowe's "Come live with me," and many students of this period feel sure that the same air was used for both lyrics. A rather fantastic picture is painted for us of the new







pleasures the lovers are to enjoy. The fish are going to be more pleased to catch Donne's mistress than she will be to ensnare them. The poet will need neither sun nor moon but only the "light of his love." In the final stanza he admits that he is ensnared by his loved one and,

"That fish, that is not catch'd thereby,  
Alas, is wiser farre than I."

"The Apparition," like "The Will," and "The Prohibition," is a small but concentrated capsule of hate. To me this is a poem of transition, one in which Jack Donne is slowly becoming the John Donne we later know. The poet is weary of intrigues and liaisons yet he grudgingly hopes to prevent the woman from enjoying any further intimacies after he is gone. In truth his ever-powerful conclusion is:

"And since my love is spent  
I'd rather thou shouldst painfully repent,  
Thou by my threatenings rest still innocent."

The poem, termed "horrible," is nevertheless powerful in its horror; and as Miss Bennett well said, "The interplay of sound and meaning is masterly."

The tempo of "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" suggests quite strongly the "Song" which begins "Sweetest love I do not go." These two poems may well be studied jointly for they are considered by many to be the sweetest and gentlest of Donne's lyrical attempts. The poem also contains a very typical seventeenth century conceit, "the stiffe twin compasses." It is interesting to note that Grierson says of this figure that "Donne's famous simile has a close parallel







in Omar Khayyam. Whether Donne's hydroptic immoderate thirst of human learning and language extended to Persian I do not know. Captain Harris has supplied me with the translation and<sup>1</sup> references:"

"In these twin compasses, O Love, you see  
One body with two heads, like you and me,  
Which wander round one center, circle wise,  
But at the last in one same point agree." 2

This poem, utilitarian like others previously mentioned, was probably written to Anne Donne when John was going on a trip, and Anne was to stay home with her ever increasing family. True to his usual fashion Donne crystalizes his thought in the closing lines, after showing by logic the fruitlessness of mourning, he caps it all by saying:

"Thy firmnes (in not mourning) drawes my circle just,  
And makes me end, where I begunne."

"The Exstasie" is Donne's best expression of his philosophy of the kind of love he knew in Anne More. The Elizabethan catalog of parts is one phase of convention that Donne employs, in this instance it is a seven-fold enumeration: hands, eye-beams, eyes, souls, posture, bodies, and blood. Donne has at last (in 1598) found true love and he strives to analyze it and determine the parts played in it by the body and the mind.

Leishman points out that in this section of the poem which follows is "one of the most illuminating of all his<sup>3</sup> philosophic writings:"

1. Grierson. Vol. II p. 41
2. Whinfield's edition of Omar Khayyam by Paul Kegan--Truber, 1901, Oriental Series, p. 216
3. Leishman, p. 43







"But as all severall soules containe  
 Mixture of things, they know not what,  
 Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,  
 And makes both one, each this and that.  
 A single violet transplant,  
 The strength, the colour, and the size,  
 (All which before was poore, and scant,)  
 Redoubles still, and multiplies.  
 When love, with one another so  
 Interinanimates two soules,  
 That abler soule, which thence doth flow,  
 Defects of lonelinesse controules.  
 Wee then, who are this new soule, know,  
 Of what we are compos'd, and made,  
 For, th'Atomies of which we grow,  
 Are soules, whom no change can invade,  
 But O alas, so long, so farre  
 Our bodies why doe wee forbear?  
 They are ours, though they are not wee, Wee are  
 The intelligences, they the spheare.  
 We owe them thanks, because they thus,  
 Did us, to us, at first convay,  
 Yeelded their forces, sense, to us,  
 Nor are drosse to us, but allay.  
 On mans heavens influences workes not so,  
 But that it first imprints the ayre,  
 Soe soule into the soule may flow,  
 Though it to body first repaire.  
 As our blood labours to beget  
 Spirits, as like soules as it can,  
 Because such fingers need to knit  
 That subtile knot, which makes us man:  
 So must pure lovers soules descend  
 T'affections and to faculties,  
 Which sense may reach and apprehend,  
 Else a great Prince in prison lies."

Here Donne borrows an illustration from the medieval physiology, which even in his own day was still regarded as scientific. The problem was to explain how the soul, being immaterial, could act upon the body; and the solution was that the soul did not act upon the body directly, but used as its instrument what were called "spirits," a kind of vapour produced by the brain.

It is questionable which conclusion Donne wanted his







reader to draw from this poem, but it seems to be that he feels that the sensual is most necessary to happiness for he says:

"To' our bodies twine wee then, that so  
Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;  
Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,  
But yet the body is his booke!"

This poem bears consideration in conjunction with Sonnet 84 of Spenser's Amoretti:"

"Let not one spark of filthy lustful fire  
Break out, that may her sacred peace molest;  
No one light glance of sensual desire  
Attempt to work her gentle mind's unrest;  
But pure affections bred in spotless breast,  
And modest thoughts breathed from well tempered  
sprites,  
Go visit her in her chaste bower of rest,  
Accompanied with angelic delights.  
There fill yourself with those most joyous sights,  
The which myself could never yet attain;  
But speak no word to her of these sad plights  
Which her too constant stiffness doth constrain.  
Only behold her rare perfection,  
And bless your fortune's fair election."

The cynical Donne of "Goe, and catche a falling starre" and "Womans Constancy" is more jovial in the poem "Loves Deitie." After toying with love in its various phases of "She loves me, she loves me not," he finally says that he, a rebel, should not be disturbed at the worst that love could do to him. Love might try to make the poet love a woman who has loved many others before him, and since no woman is true to one love then she would be false to some other man by loving the poet. In this case, however, the Donnean humor is more obvious and any viciousness is quelled for the time being.

The phrase "Loves me" or "Loves me not" concludes each







stanza in a rather rhythmic chant.

Note that Donne terms himself a rebel--he was that not only in love but more truly in poetry.

The poet's love has become a "burdenous corpulence" in "Loves Diet" and he presents his method of treatment. He proposes to feed it "discretion" which is the thing "love worst endures," and to allow love only one sigh a day. By this diet he hopes to regain his "buzzard love."

In "the Will" the reader is led trippingly along through a spontaneous lyric wondering just what the conventional closing triplet will produce. It is well to note that each stanza is terminated by a rhyming triplet each one of which begins "Thou Love." It is by such repetitions that Donne pounds home to the mind of the reader the particular point that he wishes to stress.

It is difficult to know whether or not Donne is satiric in his bequests for he leaves his tongue to Fame and surely Fame needs no tongue. Again he leaves his constancy to the planets and they are the "wanderers" of the heavens. Possibly Donne believed his contemporary, Galileo, in his revolutionary promulgation of the fixed sun and the moving earth. The gamut of heritages is run and we are told in the last few lines:

"Thou Love taughtst mee, by making mee  
Love her, who doth neglect both mee and thee,  
To' invent, and practise this one way, to'  
annihilate all three."

A melancholy somberness pervades "The Funerall," and "Loves Martyr" as the author calls himself, indulges in the



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A melancholy sobriety pervades "The Funeral," and

"Love's Martyr" as the author calls himself, indulges in the



figure he loves so well, namely, a "wreath of hair" about his arm. In "The Relique" we find the celebrated line "A bracelet of bright hair about the bone," and in this poem the line reads:

"That subtile wreath of haire, which crowns my arme."

The sadness of the piece is disturbed by the rancor of Donne, whose hatred of a false woman promises "That since you would save none of mee, I bury some of you." His mistress could have saved him by kindness, but since she refused he'll "bury Some" of her.

Donne is truly perplexed by love. He has argued that it is entirely sensual and he has argued that it is above the sensual. But in "Negative Love" he feels that both the mind and the body are satisfied by love. The poet acknowledges that he cannot fathom love, and since he can't understand it he will not be disappointed by not finding it. Donne consoles himself by saying:

"This  
As yet my ease, and comfort is  
Though I speed not, I cannot misse."

Fear and contempt for the ephemeral life of love permeates the entire poem, "A Lecture Upon the Shadow." As has been said before Donne likes the figure of the sun rising and setting and he uses that same figure to advantage in the present case. Two shadows are produced by the lovers themselves as they walk in the morning sun. When the sun is overhead the lovers tread on the shadows, so, too, in the early days of their love,







"Disguises did, and shadowes, flow,  
From us, and our cares; but, 'tis not so."

Unless the sun stay fixed in its noonday position new or different shadows will be produced and like new loves the ones forsaken are dealt with falsely. Hence the poet fears the setting sun and he says:

"To me thou, falsely, thine,  
And I to thee mine action shall disguise."

In a beautiful, flowing couplet Donne crystalizes his whole conception of love:

"Love is a growing, or full constant light;  
And his first minute, after noone, is night."

In other words, if a love reaches an apex and starts to lessen or wane, then nothing but emptiness and darkness are left to the loved ones.

"The Autumnal" is a product of John Donne rather than a youthful ranting of Jack Donne. The poem was written in honor of Mrs. Magdaline Herbert, who, in 1608, married a second time, becoming Lady Danvers. It is a very nicely worded compliment to the aging Mrs. Herbert, to whom he says:

"No spring nor summer beauty hath such grace  
As I have seen in one autumnal face."

This poem is offered in support of a contention advanced earlier in this treatise that many of John Donne's writings were of the "bread and butter" variety. Mrs. Herbert had been most kind to Donne, the impoverished verse writer, and in compensation thereof we have poems of this kind.

The poet argues very deftly that Love sits enthroned (not







buried) in the wrinkles of this woman's face and he adds that he would "rather stay with tombs than cradles, to wear out a day." In this admission it becomes obvious that Donne has reversed the stand which his youthful writings had immortalized.

An interesting cross reference between Donne and Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" may be noticed in the thoughts of the closing line of the elegy:

"I shall ebbe out with them, who home-ward goe."

The poem is pervaded by contrasts between "Spring and Summer" representing "Beauty," and "Winter" which portrays "barrednesse" and "Death."

The fullest embodiment of Donne's subjection to Platonism is to be found in this poem; one should not confuse the love in this poem with the unfailing affection which Donne bore for his devoted wife.

Donne has in Elegy XI, called "The Bracelet," carried to "the extreame," that which he ~~said he hated~~ in Elegy IX, namely, the ever popular Elizabethan play on the coin called the Angel. In Drummond's Conversations we are told that Shakespere loved the same pun:

"She has all the rule of her husband's purse;  
She hath a legion of angels."

This excerpt is found in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," I, iii.

60. "But," Drummond tells us, "Donne knows more of the philosophy of angels than Shakespere and can pursue the analogy







1

into more surprising subtleties." Donne doesn't limit himself to toying with angels in this poem but he dallies in turn with crowns, pistolets, and gold.

The theme of the poem is typically Donnean, which means it is rebellious and in strict keeping with our thought that Donne was consciously striving to counteract the sweet but unwholesome attitude of the Elizabethans toward women. Unlike the usual writer of this period, Donne tells his mistress that the only reason he is sorry that he lost her chain was that he had to spend money to replace it. He curses the finder and bitterly hopes that the "next thing thou stoop'st to reach," will be poisonous.

Two parallels to passages in Shakespeare are noticed in the poem "On His Mistress." One is the suggestion of Mrs. Donne to dress as a page boy and accompany her husband on the continental trip which he was about to make, and the other in line 36 where he writes,

"Of Players, which upon the world's stage be."

This, of course, suggests quite strongly Jaques's speech in "As You Like It" which begins:

"All the world's a stage  
And all the men and women merely players."

"As You Like It" appeared between 1598-1600 and the writing of Donne's elegy is usually given as having been produced between 1605-1606.

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1. Grierson. Vol. II. p. 76.



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 I. Critchson. Vol. II. p. 75.



desire of Anne Donne, still a young girl, to disguise herself as a page boy and accompany her husband on a trip to Italy. Again we find Donne resorting to his argumentative power as a means of convincing his wife that her proposal was unsound.

The Bridgewater Manuscript entitles this particular elegy, "His Wife Would Have Gone as His Page." Grierson has this comment to make: "In connexion with the general theme of this poem it may be noted that in 1605 Sir Robert Dudley, the illegitimate son of the Earl of Leicester, who like Donne served in the Cadiz and Islands expeditions, left England accompanied by the beautiful Elizabeth Southwell disguised as a page. At this period the most fantastic poetry was never more<sup>1</sup> fantastic than life itself."

Another interesting sidelight and study of this poem is<sup>2</sup> brought to light in the work of Mr. C. S. Lewis and the rebuttal offered Mr. Lewis by Joan Bennett. Miss Bennett says, in part, "He (Lewis) admits that he 'may be deceived' when he finds here (Elegy XVI)' a sickened male contempt for the whole female world of nurses and 'midnight startings'". Most certainly he is deceived, and the varied rhythms of that poem are an important index of the extent of that deception. One of the most remarkable things about the poem is the contrast between the solemn, tender music of the verses wherever Donne addresses the woman, and the boisterous staccato in which he describes the foreign lands to whose dangers she will be

1. Grierson, Vol. II p. 88 (Commentary).

2. Seventeenth Century Studies. Oxford. At the Clarendon Press. 1938. pp. 64-84.







17

exposed if she insists on following him abroad."

Personally I cannot see justification for Mr. Lewis's contention. By reading aloud the lines of the poem one is conscious of the resonant beauty of the free-flowing lines. I'm sure Anne was very willing to remain at home after reading these lines--the poet is so concerned that he says to her, "Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous," yet it is only "by thy kinde leave, I'll goe, and leave thee behind." Such tempered argument was very palatable to the docile Anne Donne and it is not difficult to believe that it was she who "thinke(s) it enough for me to 'have had thy love.'"

Elegy XIX is a splendid example of the mastery of rhythm which is often denied the genius of John Donne. In the forty-eight lines of this poem which is commonly known as "To His Mistress Going to Bed", there are very few lines that do not rhyme perfectly. The rhythm of the entire poem is almost flawless.

The licentiousness of the elegy is too crude to bear repetition, but the subject is treated more beautifully than its intrinsic worth deserves. The usual catalog so often used by Elizabethans is demonstrated in this poem.

An epithalamion is a piece of poetry written, as it were, at the bridal chamber. Edmund Spenser had written an epithalamion and probably with Spenser's attempt in mind Donne proceeded to write one in honor of the Princess Elizabeth. I offer this poem, called "An Epithalamion, or  
1. *ibid.* Pages 96ff.



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time and is not love at first sight, yet it is only

"by the time I'm in my fifties, and have three children." Such

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An excellent example is a piece of poetry written, as it were,

at the bride's chamber. Samuel Johnson and Milton

contrasted the poet's with Donne's style in which

Donne proceeded to write one in honor of the Princess

Elizabeth. I offer this poem, called "An Epithalamion, or

Idyll - Pages 567.



Marriage Song," as one to support the idea that Donne wrote many of his poems to secure court preferment which, however, he failed to receive until he took Holy Orders in the English Church.

An interesting cross study is seen in the material offered here and that put forth in "The Parliament of Fowls," by Chaucer. In the latter case the "Farmel egle" is said to be the Princess Anne of Bohemia, who, in January 1382, became the queen of Richard II of England. Be that as it may, Chaucer has his lovers wedding on Valentine's Day and so has Donne. The overworked flattery of poverty-stricken John Donne leads him on to heights of hyperbole. For instance, he asserts that all loves are "nothing unto this."

This marriage is of such greatness, to Donne at least, who has his mind focused on pleasing the family of Princess Elizabeth with the hope of material gain, that men will "date Records, from this thy wedding day."

Even the sun is conscious of the marrying pair, for Donne says:

"But oh, what ailes the Sunne, that here he staies  
Longer today, than other daies?  
Staies he new light from these to get?  
And finding here such store, is loth to set?"

If such exaggeration were not clothed in well written poetry, its weight would be too much for the reader. But Donne sufficiently bedded his sweet words in palatable verse so one finds it pleasant reading despite its utilitarian purpose.



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And finding here such store, is loth to set?"

If such exaggeration were not cloaked in well written poetry, its weight would be too much for the reader. But Donne sufficiently bedded his sweet words in palatable verse so one finds it pleasant reading despite its utilitarian purpose.



Satyre III is almost a sermon. It is directed against indecision of people in religious beliefs. The fact that it is almost a sermon strengthens our early contention that Donne writes in a very conversational fashion. He doesn't strive for studied literary achievement of the ordinary kind. But he talks convincingly and persuasively. He bids us know our enemies whom he indicates to be the devil, the world, and the flesh. Then he comments on the religions to be found at Rome, Geneva and in England. Donne indicates the folly of the man seeking religion who, like, "Careless Phrygius doth abhor

"All, because all cannot be good."

A splendid example of Donne's conversational method is seen in the following quotation:

"Though Truth and Falsehood be  
Near twins, yet Truth a little elder is.  
Be busy to seek her; believe me this,  
He's not of none, nor worst, that seeks the best.  
To adore, or scorn an image, or protest,  
May all be bad. Doubt wisely; in strange way  
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;  
To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,  
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will  
Reach her, about must and about must go,  
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so."

The preacher Dr. Donne is suggested to us in this poem—the embryo has been conceived, the fruit is still in the offing.



Satire III is almost a sermon. It is directed against  
 induction of people in religious beliefs. The fact that it  
 is almost a sermon strengthens our early contention that Donne  
 writes in a very conversational fashion. He doesn't strive  
 for studied literary achievement of the ordinary kind. But  
 he talks convincingly and persuasively. He bids us know our  
 enemies whom he indicates to be the devil, the world, and the  
 flesh. Then he comments on the religions to be found at Rome,  
 Geneva and in England. Donne indicates the folly of the man  
 seeking religion who, like, "Careless Phrygians both abhor  
 "All, because all cannot be good."

A splendid example of Donne's conversational method is

seen in the following quotation:

"Though Truth and Falshood be  
 Near twins, yet Truth a little older is.  
 He may to seek her; believe me this,  
 He's not of course, nor worst, that seeks the best.  
 To adore, or scorn an image, or protest,  
 May all be bad. Doubt wisely; in strange way  
 To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;  
 To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge bill,  
 Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will  
 Reach her, about must and about must go,  
 And what the bill's suddenness resists, win so."

The preacher Dr. Donne is suggested to us in this poem—

the embryo has been conceived, the truth is still in the  
 offing.



## Chapter V

### The Poems of John Donne-Debtor

#### "Venus heard me sigh this Song"

Most of the verse letters of Donne were written during that period of his life following his marriage and before he entered the ministry. It is a well known fact that these times were the most trying of Donne's tempestuous life. The struggles both physical and mental which he experienced are reflected in these poems. The Twin poems, "The Storme" and "The Calme," are youthful attempts having been written about 1594-1596 when Donne was with the Cadiz and Islands Expeditions. The fleet was driven back to Plymouth by a terrific storm which Donne describes for us in the verse letter to his friend Christopher Brooke. No doubt Donne hoped to win favour and possible patronage from Essex by immortalizing these ventures, unsuccessful as they were.

"The Storme" is realistically but not very forcefully told, and leaves the reader not too impressed by what actually was a frightful experience. The most meritorious lines of the poem are, I think, these:

"Sleepe is paines easiest salve, and doth fulfill  
All offices of death, except to kill."

"The Calme" is the companion piece to "The Storme" but is quite superior as a literary endeavor. "A stupid calme" has followed in the wake of the storm and Donne says, "In calmes, Heaven laughs



## Chapter V

### The Poems of John Donne-Deputy

"Venus heard me sigh this song"

Most of the verse letters of Donne were written during that period of his life following his marriage and before he entered the ministry. It is a well known fact that these times were the most trying of Donne's tempestuous life. The struggles both physical and mental which he experienced are reflected in these poems. The twin poems, "The Storm" and "The Calm," are youthful attempts having been written about 1584-1585 when Donne was with the Cadiz and Landed Expeditions. The fleet was driven back to Plymouth by a terrific storm which Donne describes for us in the verse letter to his friend Christopher Brooke. No doubt Donne hoped to win favour and possible patronage from Essex by immortalizing these ventures, unaccounted as they were.

"The Storm" is realistically but not very forcefully told, and leaves the reader not too impressed by what actually was a frightful experience. The most meritorious lines of the poem are, I think, these:

"Sleep is prince easiest slave, and doth fulfill  
All offices of death, except to kill."

"The Calm" is the companion piece to "The Storm" but is quite superior as a literary endeavor. "A stupid calm" has followed in the wake of the storm and Donne says, "In calmness, Heaven laughs



to see us languish thus."

"And all our beauty, and our trimme, decayes,  
Like courts removing, or like ended playes."

The last two lines are overflowing with pertinent thought. It is in such couplets that Donne reaches the very pinnacle of his poetic power. He pours forth a wealth of thought in such compressed and simple language.

We are doubly well treated in this poem for in lines 51-54 we see Donne the preacher:

"What are wee then? How little more alas  
Is man now, than before he was? He was  
Nothing; for us, wee are for nothing fit;  
Chance, or ourselves still disproportioned it."

Then we are given a potent capsule of thought -- a surprise ending and a crystalization of John Donne's moralizing.

"Wee have no power, no will, no sense; I lye,  
I should not then thus feeble this miserie."

The not-too-often quoted verse letter "To Mr. B(asil). B(rooke)" is selected for the definite purpose of using John Donne's own testimony to support my theory that he was an intentional rebel against poetic conventions. In fact I feel justified in quoting the entire poem which I believe speaks staunchly in its own behalf.

"Is not thy sacred hunger of science  
Yet satisfy'd? Is not thy braines rich hive  
Fulfil'd with hony which thou dost derive  
From the Arts spirits and their Quintessence?  
Then weane thy selfe at last, and thee withdraw  
From cambridge thy old nurse, and, as the rest,  
Here toughly chew, and sturdily digest  
Th' immense vast volumes of our common law:  
And begin soone, lest my grieffe grieve thee too,  
Which is, that that which I should have begun



to see us laughing thus."

"And all our beauty, and our trim, beauteous,  
Like courtiers removing, or like ended players."

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we see Donne the prosaist:

"What are we then? How little more alive  
Is man now, than before he was? He was  
Nothing; for us, was ere for nothing fit;  
Chance, or ourselves still disproportioned it."

Then we are given a potent capsule of thought -- a surprise

ending and a crystallization of John Donne's moralizing.

"We have no power, no will, no sense; I live,  
I should not then thus waste this miracle."

The not-too-often quoted verse letter "To Mr. H. (all). (P. 100)"

is selected for the definite purpose of using John Donne's own

testimony to support my theory that he was an intentional rebel against

poetic conventions. In fact I feel justified in quoting the entire

poem which I believe speaks eloquently in its own behalf.

"Is not thy sacred hunger of violence  
Yet satisfied? Is not thy business rich alive  
Pill'd with honey which thou dost derive  
From the arts, politics and their quintessence?  
Then whence thy calls at last, and thee withdraw  
From Cambridge thy old nurse, and, as the rest,  
Here roughly shew, and stupidly sign  
Thy business vast volumes of our common law;  
And begin again, lest my griefs give thee too,  
Which is, that that which I should have begun



In my youthes morning, now late must be done;  
 And I as Giddy Travellers must doe,  
 Which stray or sleepe all day, and having lost  
 Light and strength, darke and tir'd must then ride post.

If thou unto thy Muse be marryed,  
 Embrace her ever, ever multiply  
 Be far from me that strange Adulterie  
 To tempt thee and procure her widowhed.  
 My Muse, (for I had one,) because I' am cold,  
 Divorc'd her selfe; the cause being in me,  
 That I can take no new in Bigamye,  
 Not my will only but power doth withhold.  
 Hence comes it, that these Rymes which never had  
 Mother, want matter, and they only have  
 A little forme, the which their father gave;  
 They are prophane, imperfect, or, too bad  
 To be counted Children of Poetry  
 Except confirm'd and Bishoped by thee."

Donne was not serious (if he had in mind the poems we know of his) when he said, "that these Rymes which never had -- Mother, want matter, and they only have

A little forme, the which their Father gave."

Donne was the 17th century's outstanding inventor of stanza forms. He tried all -- used "all gently" and posterity was only able to imitate a few.

The verse letter "To the Countesse of Huntingdon" is excellent material for our purpose in that it was written after Donne had taken orders and it indicates how he was let into poetic conformity as well as religious conformity.

The standard for line stanza so seldom found in Donne's earlier writings is here seen in true form. We also find Donne still paying debts by literary production:



In my youthful morning, now late must be done;  
And I as Giddy Travelers must do,  
Which stray or elope all day, and having lost  
Light and strength, dark and tired must then ride post.

If then unto thy Muse be married,  
Ere long her ever, ever multiply  
He far from me that strange Adulteries  
To tempt thee and procure her widowed.  
My Muse, (for I had one,) because I am cold,  
Divorced her self; the cause being in me,  
That I can take no new in Elgins.  
Not my will only but power both withhold.  
Hence comes it, that these Rymes which never had  
Mother, went matter, and they only have  
A little form, the which their Father gave;  
They are prophane, imbecile, or, too bad  
To be counted Children of Poetry  
Except confirm'd and Bishoped by thee."

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The standard for line stanza as seldom found in Donne's earlier  
writings is here seen in verse form. We also find Donne still paying  
debts by literary prostitution:



"To whom, because from you all vertues flow,  
And 'tis not none, to dare contemplate you,  
I, which doe so, as your true subject one  
Some tribut for that, so these lines are due."

It will be remembered that Lady Huntingdon paid off many of Donne's debts -- hence this debt of his to her, so ably paid in verse.

The next two poems we shall consider are "the Anatomie of the World" and "Of the Progresse of the Soule." They were the first poems published in Donne's lifetime. It was quite contrary to the wishes of the author that the pieces were published, but John Donne needed shelter and support and since Sir Robert Drury insisted on the publication of the extravagant eulogies certainly John Donne, who was the receiver of Sir Robert's benefactions, could not object.

The poems were written in honor of Elizabeth Drury, the fifteen year old daughter of Sir Robert Drury. Drury became Donne's patron and gave free rent to Donne and his family, thus alleviating the burden of cares which were heavy upon the shoulders of the poet. This is another example of the way in which Donne used his poetic talents to secure bread and butter for himself and his family. Without and direct association with Drury, and having never seen the subject of his elegy, Donne pours forth tears unlimited and wins for himself the security and sustenance enjoyed in Sir Robert's own large house in Drury Lane.

The writing of such heightened flattery vexed the Countess of Bedford and Donne's other noble friends. The one good resulting



"To whom, because from you all virtues flow,  
And, 'tis not none, to dare congratulate you,  
I, which do so, as your true subject one  
Some tribute for that, as these lines are due."

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from this dissatisfaction was that we have verse letters offered to the Countess and others in appeasement for his "Anniversaries". On the other hand, he had promised in both Anniversaries to write yearly on the death of Elizabeth Drury -- but because of the rebukes received Donne proceeded no further than his "Second Anniversary".

A brief introductory piece prefaces "The First Anniversary" but it is believed that this was written by Joseph Hall.<sup>1</sup> The theme of the first Anniversary is that "the world decays".

A few examples of the hyperbole lavished on the girl Donne never saw are appropriate in support of our bread and butter theory.

"She that was best, and first originall  
Of all faire copies, and the generall  
Steward to Fate; she whose rich eyes, and breast  
Guilt the West Indies, and perfum'd the East;  
Whose having breath'd in this world, did bestow  
Spice on those Iles, and bad them still smell so,  
And that rich Indie which doth gold interre,  
Is but as single money, coyn'd from her:  
She to whom this world must it selfe refer,  
As Suburbs, or the Microcosme of her,  
Shee, shee is dead; shee's dead: when thou knowst this,  
Thou knowst how lame a cripple this world is."

Another extravagance of feeling and intellect is seen in the lines:

"And, Oh, it can no more be questioned,  
That beauties best, proportion, is dead,  
Since even grieve it selfe, which now alone  
Is left us, is without proportion.  
Shee by whose lines proportion should bee  
Examin'd, measure of all Symmetree,  
Whom had that Ancient seen, who thought soules made  
Of Harmony, he would at next have said  
That Harmony was shee, and thence infer,

1. Hayward p. 774.



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Whom had that Ancient seer, who taught soulles made  
Of Harmony, he would at next have said  
That Harmony was shee, and chance infer,



That soules were but Resultances from her,  
 And did from her into our bodies goe,  
 As to our eyes, the formes from objects flow:  
 Shee, who if those great Doctors truly said  
 That the Arke to mans proportions was made  
 Had been a type for that, as that might be  
 A type of her in this, that contrary  
 Both Elements, and Passions liv'd at peace  
 In her, who caus'd all Civill war to cease.  
 Shee, after whom, what forme soe'r we see,  
 Is discord, and rude incongruitie:  
 Shee, Shee is dead, shee's dead: when thou knowst this  
 Thou knowst how ugly a monster this world is:"

"Perchance the world might have recovered,  
 If she whom we lament had not beene dead:"

Donne's preliminary promise to write yearly in honor of  
 Elizabeth is put forth in the following lines:

"And, blessed maid,  
 Of whom is meant what ever hath been said,  
 Or shall be spoken well by any tongue,  
 Whose name refines course lines, and makes prose song,  
 Accept this tribute, and his first yeares rent,  
 Who till his darke short tapers end be spend,  
 As oft as thy feast sees this widowed earth,  
 Will yearely celebrate thy second birth,  
 That is, thy death."

Some accept Donne's explanation in answer to Jonson's disgust  
 at the exaggeration displayed in the poem, that it was "the Idea  
 of a Woman and not as she was", that inspired the composition --  
 but we feel that the abundance of Druryisms are too o'erpowering  
 to allow any such theory. Donne wrote the poem for sustenance --  
 and only the rebukes of his noble friends caused him to retract  
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To be sure a "Second Anniversary" was written and although  
 the hyperbolic eulogizing is somewhat tempered by the passing of a



That soul was but Resistance from her,  
 And did from her into our bodies go,  
 As to our eyes, the forms from objects flow:  
 She, who if those great bodies truly said  
 That the Arts to make proportions was made  
 Had been a type for that, as that might be  
 A type of her in this, that contrary  
 Both Elements, and Passions liv'd at peace  
 In her, who caus'd all civil war to cease.  
 She, when, what form soe'er we see,  
 Is disorder, and rude incongruities:  
 She, she is dead, she's dead: when thou knowest this  
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 Accept this tribute, and his first year's rent,  
 Who till his dark's short taper and he spend,  
 As oft as thy feast sees this widowed earth,  
 Will yearly celebrate thy second birth,  
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year we still find signs of gross exaggeration. The food and hospitality provided by the father of Elizabeth Drury certainly were worth a poem of laudation.

At the beginning of this "Second Anniversary" Donne states that he intends to write an Anniversary every year and he hopes other poets will follow his example. An interesting cross reference is evident in the lines,

....."my life shall bee,  
To be hereafter prais'd, for praying thee."

Does this not suggest the lines of Milton in "Lycidas" when he hopes that some future poet will do for him what he is doing for Edward King? Milton says:

"So may some gentle Muse  
With lucky words favour my destined urn,  
And as he passes turn,  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud!"

The main theme of this "Second Anniversary" is the antithesis between things spiritual and things worldly. He strikes the keynote of the piece in the line "So struggles this dead world, now she is gone." The dead world is in contrast to the spiritual perfection of Elizabeth Drury.

"The world is but a carkasse; thou art fed  
By it, but as a worme, that carkasse bred;  
And why should'st thou, poore worme, consider more,  
When this world will grow better than before,  
Than those thy fellow wormes doe thinke upon  
That carkasses last resurrection."

The poem, despite the servility of its purpose, gave eloquent tongue to some remarkable lines of spiritual sermonizing attained



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gone." The dead world is in contrast to the spiritual perfection  
of Elizabeth Barry.

"The world is but a carcase; then art fed  
By it, but as a worme, that carcases prey;  
And why should'st thou, poore worme, consider more,  
Than these thy fellow wormes doe thinke upon  
That carcases have resurrection."

The poem, despite the simplicity of its purpose, gave eloquent  
force to some remarkable lines of spiritual reasoning attained



only in the preaching of Dr. Donne.

"Thinke then, my soule, that death is but a Groome,  
Which brings a Taper to the outward roome,  
Whence thou spiest first a little glimmering light,  
For such approaches doth heaven make in death."

A line more quotable than many lines of more popular poets is:

"For they're in heaven on earth who heaven's workes do."

Donne takes occasion in the following lines to chide the insignificance of man's knowledge:

"What hope have wee to know our selves, when wee  
Know not the least things, which for our use be?  
Wee see in Authors, too stiffe to recant,  
A hundred controversies of an Ant;  
And yet one watches, starves, freezes, and sweats,  
To know but Catechismes and Alphabets  
Of unconverning things, matters of fact;  
How others on our stage their parts did Act  
What Caesar did, yea, and that Cicero said.  
Why grasse is greene, or why our blood is red,  
Are mysteries which none have reach'd unto.  
In this low forme, poore soule, what wilt thou doe?  
When wilt thou shake off this Pedantry,  
Of being taught by sense, and Fantasie?  
Thou look'st through spectacles; small things seeme great  
Below; But up unto the watch-towre get,  
And see all things despoyl'd of fallacies:  
Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eyes,  
Nor heare through Labyrinths of eares, nor learne  
By circuit, or collections to discern.  
In heaven thou straight know'st all, concerning it,  
And what concernes it not, shalt straight forget."

In the closing lines of the above passage one can clearly sense the theory Donne followed throughout his lifetime. Donne wanted to know all things "despoyl'd of fallacies." This idea of Donne's so completely and simply stated here applied particularly to his literary life. He wanted to know literature, art, and life not "through Labyrinths of eares"; he wanted to know







them as they come directly to himself. This is the very reason why he rejected the staid patterns, forms, and conventions offered to him but not accepted by him. He did not want to "learn by circuit, or collections to discern" -- he wanted to learn by experiment, and that is exactly what he did. John Donne was never hindered by literary laws, tenets, nor vogues -- he was a free and fanciful agent.

There seems to be little need to indicate the laudations poured forth in honor of Elizabeth Drury, but since the entire piece is interlarded by such tributes we quote one that bolsters our conception of Donne's conscious debt to Sir Robert.

"But thou would'st not; nor would'st thou be content,  
To take this, for my second yeares true Rent,  
Did this Coine beare any other stampe, than his,  
That gave thee power to doe, me, to say this."

The "his" in this case seems to me to refer to Sir Robert Drury. The "Anniversaries" may well be considered as just payment of the three years during which Donne enjoyed Sir Robert's hospitality in Drury Lane.

"The Progresse of the Soule" is one of the few poems of Donne which is definitely dated. In his prefatory remarks he places it for us on 16. August 1601. It is well to remember that at this time Donne was in the employ of Sir Thomas Egerton, and it should be further recalled that it was during this period that Donne proceeded 'with humility and diffidence' in search of religion. There seem to be puerility and absence of purpose in this poem rather than



them as they came directly to himself. This is the very reason why he rejected the stated systems, forms, and conventions offered to him but not accepted by him. He did not want to "learn by rote" or collections to discourse" -- he wanted to learn by experiment, and that is exactly what he did. John Donne was never hindered by literary laws, fetters, nor vulgar -- he was a free and fearless agent.

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"But then wouldst not; nor wouldst thou be content,  
To take this, for my second years true rent,  
Did this come from any other source, than his,  
That gave thee power to do, me, to say this."

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"The Progress of the Soul" is one of the few poems of Donne which is definitely dated. In his prefatory remarks he places it for us on 16. August 1601. It is well to remember that at this time Donne was in the employ of Sir Thomas Egerton, and it should be further recalled that it was during this period that Donne proceeded "with humility and diligence" in search of religion. There seem to be querulity and absence of purpose in this poem rather than



"humility and diffidence" mentioned by the author.

De Quincey, who seems to be quite alone in his praise of the poem, asserted that 'massy diamonds compose the very substance of this poem, or the metempsychosis, thoughts and descriptions which have the fervent and gloomy sublimity of Ezechiel or Aeschyl<sup>1</sup>us." These massy literary diamonds were, according to Ben Jonson, supposed to terminate in the being of Calvin. Quoting Jonson we learn that 'The conceit of Donne's Transformation or Metempsychosis was that he sought the soule of that apple which Eve pulled and thereafter made it the soule of a bitch, then of a shee wolf, and so of a woman; his generall purpose was to have brought in all the bodies of the Hereticks from the soule of sin, and at last left in the bodie of Calvin. Of this he never wrotte but one sheet, and now, since he was made a Doctor, repenteth highlie and seeketh to destroy all his poem<sup>2</sup>s."

Adhering to our idea that Donne usually wrote for a definite utilitarian purpose we find that he altered his plan and finally present the "Massy Diamonds" to good Queen Bess. This belief is substantiated by the lines that follow:

"For the great soule which here amongst us now  
Doth dwell, and moves that hand, and tongue, and brow,  
(For 'tis the crowne, and last straine of my song)  
This soule to whom Luther, and Mahomet were  
Prisons of flesh; this soule which oft did teare,  
And mend the wracks of th' Empire, and late Rome,  
And liv'd when every great change did come,  
Had first in paradise, a low, but fatall roome."

1. Gosse Vol 1 p. 139

2. " " " p. 132-133



"humility and diffidence" mentioned by the author.

De Quincey, who seems to be quite alone in his praise of the poem, asserted that "massy diamonds compose the very substance of this poem, or the metaphysics, thoughts and descriptions which have the fervent and gloomy spirituality of Eschschol or Aeschylus." These massy literary diamonds were, according to Ben Jonson, supposed to terminate in the being of Calvin. Quoting Jonson we learn that "The conceit of Donne's transformation of Metempsychosis was that he sought the souls of that apple which Eve pulled and thereafter made it the soul of a bitch, then of a shee wolf, and so of a woman; his general purpose was to have brought in all the bodies of the Heretics from the souls of sin, and at last left in the body of Calvin. Of this he never wrote but one sheet, and now, since he was made a Doctor, repenteth himself and seeks to destroy all his poems."

Adhering to our idea that Donne usually wrote for a definite utilitarian purpose we find that he altered his plan and finally presented the "Massy Diamonds" to good Queen Bess. This belief is substantiated by the lines that follow:

"For the great souls which here amongst us now  
 Both dwell, and move that hand, and tongue, and brow,  
 (For 'tis the crown, and last attire of my song)  
 This soul to whom Luther, and Mahomet were  
 Prisoners of flesh; this soul which oft did tear,  
 And mend the wrecks of the Babel, and late Rome,  
 And liv'd when every great change did come,  
 Had first in paradise, a low, but fatal room."



An idea that is often found in Donne is given to us in the first line of Stanza X and is an echo of the "First Anniversary". In the latter poem Donne Declares:

"For that first marriage (Adam and Eve) was our funerall:  
One woman at one blow, then kill'd us all,  
And singly, one by one, they kill us now."

The same thought in more concise form is found in "The Progress of the Soule":

"Man all at once was there (in Paradise) by woman slaine."

Another suggestion worthy of thought is the presence of his constant distrust for woman. This seems to be a favourite theme of Donne. He uses it in many variations -- never tiring of it until he substituted love of things divine for any worldly love after the passing of his wife. Then and only then, do his tirades against womankind cease.

In the prose introduction to "The Progresse of the Soule" Donne tells us what he wants his readers to bear in mind,

"All which I will bid you remember, (for I will have no such Readers as I can teach) is, that the Pithagorian doctrine doth not only carry one soule from man to man, nor man to beast, but indifferently to plants also and therefore you must not grudge to finde the same soule in an Amperour, and in a Post-horse, and in a Mucheron, since no unreadinesse in the soule, but an indisposition in the organs workes this. And therefore though this soule could not move when it was a Melon, yet it may remember, and now tell mee, at what lascivious banquet it was serv'd. And though it could not speake, when it was a spider, yet it can remember, and now tell me, who used it for poyson to attaine dignitie. How ever the bodies have dull'd her other faculties, her memory hath ever been her owne, which makes me so seriously deliver you by her relation all her passages from her first making when shee was that apple which Eve eate, to this time when shee is hee, whose life you shall finde in the end of this booke."







Donne does, in this, his most ambitious poem, just what he promises. He leads the reader on a circuituous chase of the soul through innumerable forms of life from the apple given by the serpent to Eve, until after many digressions, it finds human habitation in Siphatecia, Adam's fifth daughter, sister and wife to Caine. Gosse very appropriately and humorously states the case when he says that "we have not yet advanced out of sight of the Garden of Eden, and at this rate of progress it would have taken millions of verses to bring us safely down to Queen Elizabeth."<sup>1</sup>

Not only do we see this poem as a "bread and butter" tribute to Elizabeth but we also see it as a boyish rebellion against the poetic fashions and tendencies of Edmund Spenser. Donne was tired of the monotonous sameness of Spenser's out-pourings which were aped and imitated by Daniel, Davys, and Drayton, and he offers this boyish work, which we now only have in fragment, as his thrust against convention.

1. Gosse Vol. 1. p 138







## Chapter VI

### The Poems of John Donne, the Divine

"How is the gold become so dimme?"

It is in the "Holy Sonnets" that we first hear the true melodic tones of Donne's best writings, namely, his religious poems. Donne is now beyond the grasp of poverty, hunger, and deprivation; his magnanimous soul comes into its true country. He no longer writes to satisfy any person upon whom he is dependent for the necessities of existence. He is a free soul and has all God's heavenly sphere to fly, he knows no bounds, he fears no patron, he is Dr. Donne of Saint Paul's. There is an evidence pervading these "Holy Sonnets" which indicates that Donne has discovered the truth so late in life and was so anxious to make zealous amends for his carelessly spent life that a tense swiftness hovers over all.

John Hayward declares that "The Divine Poems must be counted as Donne's highest achievement in verse."<sup>1</sup> The "Holy Sonnets" were written after Anne Donne's death in 1617. John Donne, who in his early days had loved many women, passed to an unflinching devotion for one woman, and on her death he turned the love of his heart and soul to God and to Religion.

The poet tells us of this conversion to divine worship in Holy Sonnet XVLL quoted here:

"Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt  
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,  
And her Soule early into heaven ravished,

<sup>1</sup> Hayward - page 274



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Sonnet XVII quoted here:

"Since she whom I lov'd hath paid her last debt  
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,  
And her soul's early into heaven ravished,



Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.  
 Here the admyring her my mind did whett  
 To seeke thee God; so streames do shew their head;  
 But thought I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,  
 A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett.  
 But why should I begg more Love, when as thou  
 Dost wooe my soule for hers; offering all thine;  
 And dost not only feare least I allow  
 My Love to Saints and Angels things divine,  
 But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt  
 Least the World, Fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out.

A contrite Donne is a severe self-accuser in the various sonnets.

In one he says his guilt is worse than that of the Jews who killed  
 Christ:-

"Spit in my face you Jewes, and pierce my side,  
 Buffet, and scoffe, scourge, and crucifie mee,  
 For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd and onely hee,  
 Who could do no iniquitie, hath dyed:  
 But by my death can not be satisfied  
 My sinnes, which passe the Jewes impiety:  
 They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I  
 Crucifie him daily, being now glorified."

Again he sorrows for his sinful life:-

"I am a little world made cunningly  
 Of Elements, and an Angelike spright,  
 But black sinne hath betraid to endless night  
 My world's both parts, and (oh) both parts must die."

And,

"So, fall my sinnes.....  
 To where they bred, and would press me, to Hell."

Realizing the awfulness of his sins, yet the briefness of time

Donne begs:-

"For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,  
 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy Grace,  
 When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,  
 Teach mee how to repent."



Wholly on heavenly things my mind is cast.  
 Here the adorning her my mind did waste  
 To seek thee God; so wondrous to show their heads;  
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 Teach mee how to repent."



In the concluding lines of this same sonnet (No. VII) we hear Donne's trust in God expressed:

"For that's as good  
As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood."

In Sonnet IX Donne expresses once more his sorrow for his sins:-

"But who am I, that dare dispute with thee  
O God? Oh! of thine onely worthy blood,  
And my teares, make a heavenly Lethean flood,  
And drowne in it my sinnes blacke memorie;  
That thou remember them, some claime as debt,  
I thinke it mercy, if thou wilt forget.

The newly converted John Donne is still not completely imbued with unquestioning faith -- he wonders, he asks, he hesitates. In Sonnet XVIII he asks:

"Show me deare Christ, thy Spouse, so bright and clear.  
What! is it She, which on the other shore  
Goes richly painted? or which rob'd and tore  
Laments and mournes in Germany and here?  
Sleepes she a thousand, then peepes up one yeare?  
Is she selfe truth and errs? now new, now outwore?  
Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore  
On one, on seaven, or on no hill appeare?  
Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights  
First travaile we to seeke and then make Love?  
Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sights,  
And let myne amorous soule court thy mild Dove,  
Who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then  
When she's embrac'd and open to most men."

Grierson, speaking of this sonnet, writes; "It is clear enough why this sonnet was not published. It would have revealed Donne, already three years in orders, as still conscious of all the difficulties involved in a choice between the three divisions of Christianity -- Rome, Geneva, (made to include Germany), and England. This is the theme of his earliest serious poem, the Satyre III, and



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Is she the truth and error now new, now outwore?  
Both she, and bid she, and shall she evermore  
On one, or severen, or on no hill appeare?  
Dwell she with us, or like adventuring knights  
First travell we to seek and then make love?  
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And let your sweet sonne court the wild Dove,  
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the subject recurs in the letters and sermons. Donne entered the Church of England not from a conviction that it, and it alone, was the true Church, but because he had first reached the position that there is salvation in each: 'You know I never fettered nor imprisoned the word Religion; not straitening it Frierly ad Religiones factitias, (as the Romans call well their orders of Religion) nor immuring it in a Rome, or a Wittenberg, or a Geneva; they are all virtually beams of one Sun, and wheresoever they find clay hearts, they harden them, and moulder them into dust; and they entender and mollifie waxen. They are not so contrary as the North and South Poles; and that they are connatural pieces of one circle.' " 1

Donne reached sublimity of poetic expression, yet conveys to the reader the true state of his questioning mind in the first sonnet of this group. Dual interpretation has been given this sonnet, some believe the "Thou" refers to religion or God, but because of the intimacy and personalized feeling of the poem I am convinced it refers to Anne Donne.

"Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?  
 Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,  
 I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,  
 And all my pleasures are like yesterday;  
 I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,  
 Despaire behind, and death before doth cast  
 Such terrour, and my feeble flesh doth waste  
 By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh;  
 Onely thou are above, and when towards thee  
 By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;  
 But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,  
 That not one houre my selfe I can sustaine;  
 Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art  
 And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart."

1. Grierson Vol. II Page 235-236.



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By thy leave I can look, I rise again;  
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,  
That not one hour my selfe I can sustaine;  
Thy Grace may win me to prevent his art  
And thou like Adamst draw mine from heart."



Note how fearful Donne is of his tardy conversion. He has nothing but "despaire behind, and death before" him. Yet this viewpoint seems to be dissipated by the staunchness of his stand against death as displayed in sonnet X. He rebukes the power of death in these lines:

"Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,  
For, those, whome thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.  
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,  
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,  
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,  
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

Finally he begs God to take his heart by force, Donne is terrified by his past life. He is vexed by his present standing as a new convert, and he is distrustful of his own power to carry on, but in a staccato of consonantal monosyllables he pours forth his entreaties in an extremely moving fashion.

"Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you  
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, 'and bend  
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.  
I, like an usurpt towne, to 'another due,  
Labour to 'admit you, but Oh, to no end,  
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.  
Yet dearly 'I love you, 'and would be loved faine,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy:  
Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe,  
Take me, to you, imprison mee, for I  
Except you 'enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee."



Note how fearful Donne is of his tardy conversion. He has nothing but "despair behind, and death before" him. Yet this view-point seems to be dissipated by the steadfastness of his stand against death as displayed in sonnet X. He renounces the power of death in these lines:

"Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture be,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and souls deliver!  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, Kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
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"Better my heart, whose person'd God; for, you  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.  
I, like an unapprising dove, to answer you,  
Labour to 'admit you, but Oh, to no end,  
Reason your victory in me, me should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly 'I love you, and would be loved faine,  
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
Divorce me, 'twixt, or break that knot againe,  
Take me, to you, imprison me, for I,  
Except you 'enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me."



This is a disturbing picture, but it quite fits the life of Donne. It is a stormy picture -- one of battle, death and siege -- but isn't that a fit reproduction of Donne himself? Stormy, rebellious, and unruly. Isn't that a true replica of a pioneer -- an inventor -- a trail blazer?

"La Corona" may be thought of as a counter piece to "Metempsychosis" or "The Progress of the Soule." The former is a more mature work, and the subject matter does not get out of hand as did "The Progress of the Soule". "La Corona" is a sonnet cycle composed as Donne was recovering from the loss of his wife, and it contains his new and fervent philosophy of religion.

The important incidents in the life of Christ form the framework on which Donne built, and the poem is brought to an unusually fine spiritual and poetic peak in the closing lines:-

"O strong Ramme, which hast batter'd heaven for mee,  
Mild Lambe, which with thy blood, hast mark'd the path;  
Bright Torch, which shin'st, that I the way may see,  
Oh, with thy owne blood quench thy owne just wrath,  
And if thy holy Spirit, my Muse did raise,  
Deigne at my hands this crown of prayer and praise."

The other divine writings of Donne are of a calibre quite superior to much of his secular writings, for they are the free chantings of a completely changed man. The taking of orders by Donne and the passing of his deeply beloved wife, caused a change in Donne, the true significance of which can only be seen by a close study and comparison of his Songs and Sonnets as opposed to his divine poetry.



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The important incidents in the life of Christ form the frame-  
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 fine spiritual and poetic peak in the closing lines:-

"O strong Name, which hast better'd Heaven for man,  
 Mild Lamb, which with thy blood, hast mark'd the path;  
 Bright Torch, which shin'st, that I the way may see,  
 Oh, with thy own blood quench thy own just wrath,  
 And if thy holy Spirit, my Muse did raise,  
 Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise."

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A fitting climax for all the writings of Donne, one in which the reader sees the composite Jack, John, and Dr. Donne, is his poem "A Hymn to God the Father". Referring to this poem, one of Donne's most beautiful divine works, Walton informs us that on his recovery from one of his last sicknesses, Donne caused this hymn to be "set to a most grave and solemn tune, and to be sung to the organ by the choristers of St. Paul's Church, in his own hearing, especially at the evening service."<sup>1</sup>

In stanza one of this poem Donne asks if he will be forgiven for the sins of his youth, which although were no longer practised, had been practised. In stanza two, one is led to believe that the sins which "have moved others to sinne, and, made my sinne their doore" are the bawdy and sensual poems which may have caused a moral downfall in some of his readers.

In stanza three the aging dean, who now has only the sin of fear, asks God to swear "that at my death thy Sonne shall shine as he shines now," and then Donne will "feare no more". The theme of this splendid lyric, particularly that of stanza two, is reechoed in "The Second Anniversary" in the lines quoted below:

"The poyson's gone through all, poysons affect  
Chiefly the chieftest parts, but some effect  
In Nailles, and haires, yea excrements, will show;  
So lyes the poyson of sinne in the most lowe."

After his early years Donne is Conscious of the unending harm his ribald writings may have done. And it is undoubtedly with this

1. Walton, Page 93



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In stanza one of this poem Donne asks if he will be forgiven for the sins of his youth, which although were no longer practised, had been practised. In stanza two, one is led to believe that the sins which "have moved others to shame, and made my shame their shame" are the bawdy and sensual poems which may have caused a moral downfall in some of his readers.

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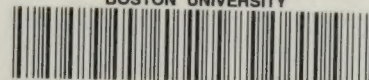
Thought foremost in his mind that we see the penitent Dr. Donne  
striving to blot out the far-flung writings of his reckless youth.



Though foremost in his mind that we see the patient Dr. Gurne  
striving to blot out the far-flung writings of his reckless youth.



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